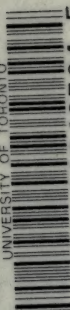


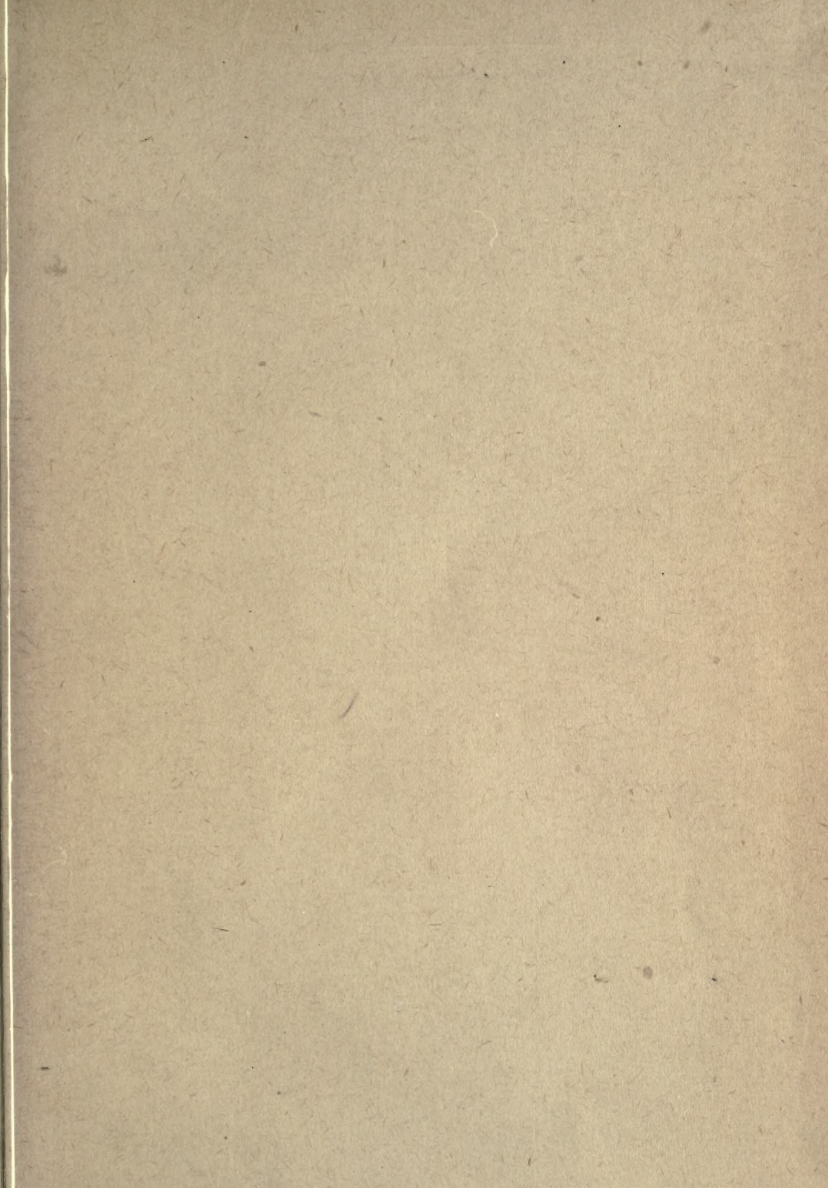
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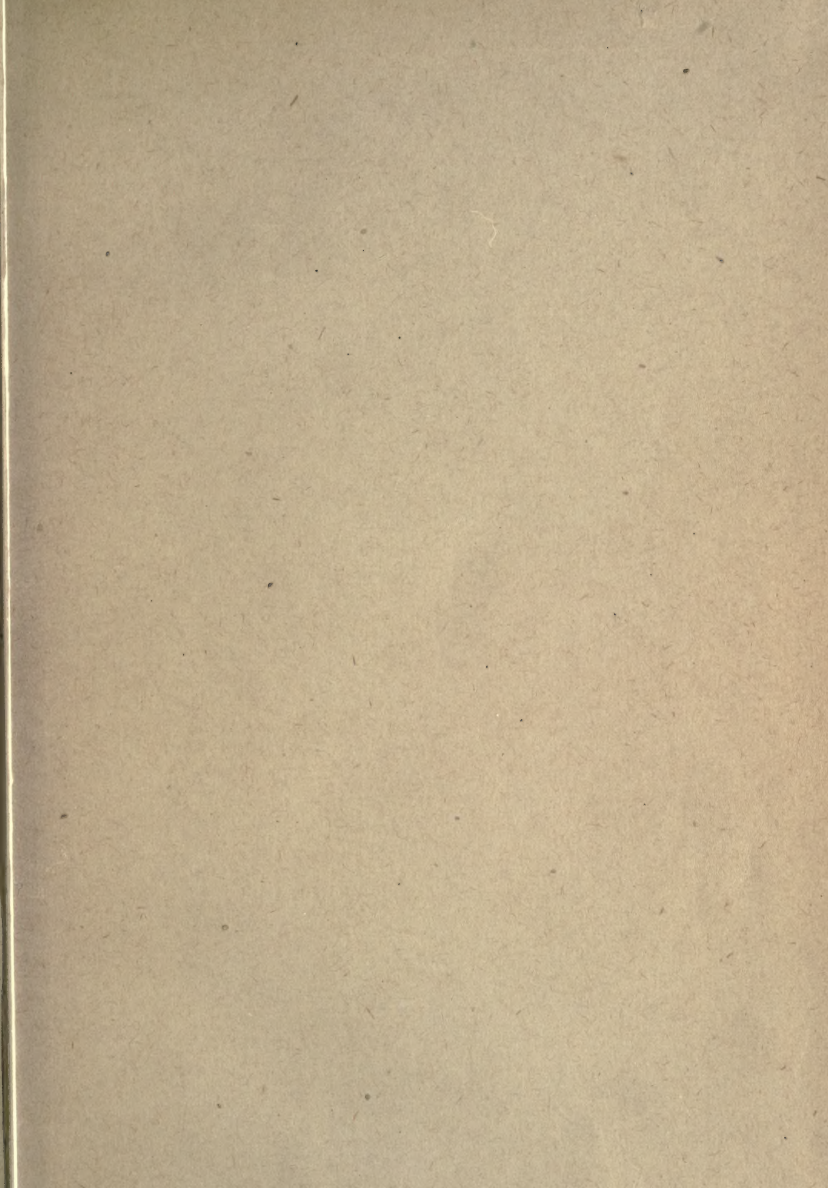
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## Mullins

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

These Plays with Henry Bannister (containing the  
 scenes of the Festival, the Chorus, and the

# The Last of the De Mullins

in 6d. net.

These plays are also published separately in paper  
 covers, at 1s. 6d. net.

The Two Mr. Wetherstons. 1s. 6d. net.

LONDON: SAMUEL FRENCH.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

THREE PLAYS WITH HAPPY ENDINGS (containing *The Return of the Prodigal*, *The Charity that Began at Home* and *The Cassilis Engagement*). Cloth, 3s. 6d. nett.

These plays are also published separately, in paper covers, at 1s. 6d. nett.

THE TWO MR. WETHERBYS. 1s. 6d. nett.

LONDON: SAMUEL FRENCH.



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The Last of the De  
Mullins

A Play without a Prince

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## The Persons in the Play

HUGO DE MULLIN . . . . .	
JANE DE MULLIN . . . . .	<i>His wife</i>
MRS. CLOUSTON . . . . .	<i>His sister.</i>
JANET DE MULLIN . . . . .	( <i>Mrs. Seagrave</i> ) <i>Hugo's eldest daughter.</i>
JOHNNY SEAGRAVE . . . . .	<i>Her son.</i>
HESTER DE MULLIN . . . . .	<i>Her sister.</i>
BERTHA ALDENHAM . . . . .	
MONTY BULSTEAD . . . . .	
DR. ROLT . . . . .	<i>The local doctor.</i>
MR. BROWN . . . . .	<i>The curate.</i>
MISS DEANES . . . . .	
ELLEN . . . . .	<i>Maid at the De Mullins'.</i>

*The action of the play takes place at Brendon Underwood in Dorset, Acts I and III at the Manor House, the De Mullins' house in the village, Act II on the borders of Brendon Forest. Three days pass between Acts I and II, five between Acts II and III.*



*Cast of the original Production before the Stage Society  
at the Haymarket Theatre, London, on  
December 6 and 7, 1908.*

Hester De Mullin. . . . .	Miss Amy Lam- born.
Mr. Brown . . . . .	Mr. Nigel Playfair.
Jane De Mullin . . . . .	Miss Adela Mea- son.
Mrs. Clouston . . . . .	Miss McAIMÉE Murray.
Dr. Rolt . . . . .	Mr. Ernest Young.
Hugo De Mullin . . . . .	Mr. H. A. Saints- bury.
Ellen . . . . .	Miss Jean Bloom- field.
Janet De Mullin. . . . .	Miss Lillah McCarthy.
Johnny Seagrave . . . . .	Master Bobbie Andrews.
Miss Deanes . . . . .	Miss Clare Greet.
Monty Bulstead . . . . .	Mr. Vernon Steel.
Bertha Aldenham . . . . .	Miss Jean Hark- ness.

The play produced by Mr. W. Graham Browne.

# The Last of the De Mullins

## ACT I

SCENE : *The Inner Hall at the Manor House in Brendon-Underwood village. An old-fashioned white-panelled room. At the back is a big stone-mullioned Tudor window looking out on to the garden. On the left of this is a bay in which is a smaller window. A door in the bay leads out into the garden. People entering by this door pass the window before they appear. The furniture is oak, mostly Jacobean or older. The right-hand wall of the room is mainly occupied by a great Tudor fireplace, over which the De Mullin Coat of Arms is carved in stone. Above this a door leads to the outer hall and front door. A door on the opposite side of the room leads to the staircase and the rest of the house. The walls are hung with a long succession of family portraits of all periods and in all stages of dinginess as to*

*both canvas and frame. When the curtain rises the stage is empty. Then HESTER is seen to pass the window at the back, followed by MR. BROWN. A moment later they enter. MR. BROWN is a stout, rather unwholesome-looking curate, HESTER a lean, angular girl of twenty-eight, very plainly and unattractively dressed in sombre tight-fitting clothes. She has a cape over her shoulders and a black hat on. BROWN wears seedy clerical garments, huge boots and a squashy hat. The time is twelve o'clock in the morning of a fine day in September.*

HESTER

Come in, Mr. Brown. I'll tell mother you're here. I expect she's upstairs with father (*going towards door*).

BROWN

Don't disturb Mrs. De Mullin, please. I didn't mean to come in.

HESTER

You'll sit down now you *are* here ?

BROWN

Thank you (*does so awkwardly*). I'm so glad to hear Mr. De Mullin is better. The Vicar will be glad too.

HESTER

Yes. Dr. Rolt thinks he will do all right now.



BROWN

You must have been very anxious when he was first taken ill.

HESTER

We were terribly anxious. [*HESTER takes off her hat and cape and puts them down on the window seat.*]

BROWN

I suppose there's no doubt it was some sort of stroke?

HESTER

Dr. Rolt says no doubt.

BROWN

How did it happen?

HESTER

We don't know. He had just gone out of the room when we heard a fall. Mother ran out into the hall and found him lying by the door quite unconscious. She was dreadfully frightened. So were we all.

BROWN

Had he been complaining of feeling unwell?

HESTER

Not specially. He complained of the heat a little. And he had a headache. But father's not strong, you know. None of the De Mullins are, Aunt Harriet says.

BROWN

Mrs. Clouston is with you now, isn't she?

HESTER

Yes. For a month. She generally stays with us for a month in the summer.

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BROWN

I suppose she's very fond of Brendon ?

HESTER

All the De Mullins are fond of Brendon, Mr. Brown.

BROWN

Naturally. You have been here so long.

HESTER

Since the time of King Stephen.

BROWN

Not in this house ?

HESTER (*smiling*)

Not in this house, of course. It's not old enough for that.

BROWN

Still, it must be very old. The oldest house in the Village, isn't it ?

HESTER

Only about four hundred years. The date is 1603. The mill is older, of course.

BROWN

You still own the mill, don't you ?

HESTER

Yes. Father would never part with it. He thinks everything of the mill. We get our name from it, you know. De Mullin. Du Moulin. "Of the Mill."

BROWN

Were the original De Mullins millers then ?

HESTER (*rather shocked at such a suggestion*)  
Oh no !

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BROWN

I thought they couldn't have been.

HESTER

No De Mullin has ever been in trade of *any* kind !  
But in the old days to own a mill was a feudal privilege.  
Only lords of manors and the great abbeys had them.  
The farmers had to bring all their corn to them to be  
ground.

BROWN

I see.

HESTER

There were constant disputes about it all through  
the Middle Ages.

BROWN

Why was that ?

HESTER

The farmers would rather have ground their corn  
for themselves, I suppose.

BROWN

Why ? If the De Mullins were willing to do it for  
them ?

HESTER

They had to pay for having it ground, of course.

BROWN (*venturing on a small joke*)

Then the De Mullins *were* millers, after all, in a  
sense.

HESTER

You mustn't let father hear you say so !

BROWN

The mill is never used now, is it ?



HESTER

No. When people gave up growing corn round here and all the land was turned into pasture it fell into decay, and now it's almost ruinous.

BROWN

What a pity!

HESTER

Yes. Father says England has never been the same since the repeal of the Corn laws. (*Enter MRS. DE MULLIN and MRS. CLOUSTON by the door on the left, followed by DR. ROLT.*) Here is mother—and Aunt Harriet.

*Mrs. De Mullin, poor lady, is a crushed, timid creature of fifty-eight or so, entirely dominated by the DE MULLIN fetish and quite unable to hold her own against either her husband or her sister-in-law, a hard-mouthed, resolute woman of sixty. Even HESTER she finds almost too much for her. For the rest a gentle, kindly lady, rather charming in her extreme helplessness. ROLT is the average country doctor, brisk, sensible, neither a fool nor a genius.*

ROLT (*as they enter the room*)

He's better. Distinctly better. A little weak and depressed, of course. That's only to be expected. Good morning.

[*Shakes hands with HESTER. Nods to BROWN.*

MRS. DE MULLIN

Mr. De Mullin is always nervous about himself.

ROLT

Yes. Constitutional, no doubt. But he'll pick up in a few days. Keep him as quiet as you can. That's really all he needs now.

MRS. DE MULLIN

You don't think he ought to stay in his room ? . . . Good morning, Mr. Brown. Are you waiting to see me ?

[BROWN *shakes hands with both ladies.*

BROWN (*awkwardly*)

Not specially. I walked over from the church with Miss De Mullin.

HESTER

Is father coming downstairs, mother ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Yes, Hester. He insisted on getting up. You know he always hates staying in his room.

HESTER

Oh, Dr. Rolt, do you think he *should* ?

ROLT

I don't think it will do him any harm. He can rest quietly in a chair or on the sofa. . . . Well, I must be off. Good-bye, Mrs. De Mullin.

[*Shakes hands briskly with every one.*

BROWN (*rising ponderously*)

I must be going too (*shakes hands with Mrs. DE MULLIN*). You'll tell Mr. De Mullin I inquired after him ? Good-bye, Mrs. Clouston (*shakes hands*). And you're coming to help with the Harvest Decorations on Saturday, aren't you, Miss De Mullin ?

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HESTER (*shaking hands*)

Of course.

[BROWN and ROLT go out.

MRS. CLOUSTON

(*seating herself and beginning to knit resolutely*)

What singularly unattractive curates the Vicar seems to get hold of, Jane!

MRS. DE MULLIN (*meekly*)

Do you think so, Harriet?

MRS. CLOUSTON

Quite remarkably. This Mr. Brown, for instance. He has the most enormous *feet*! And his boots! I've never seen such boots!

HESTER (*flushing*)

We needn't sneer if Mr. Brown doesn't wear fine clothes, Aunt Harriet.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Of course not Hester. Still, I think he goes to the opposite extreme. And he really is quite abnormally plain. Then there was that Mr. Snood, who was curate when I was down last year. The man with the very red hands. (*These acid comments are too much for Hester, who flounces out angrily. Mrs. Clouston looks up for a moment, wondering what is the meaning of this sudden disappearance. Then continues unmoved.*) I'm afraid the clergy aren't what they were in our young days, Jane.

MRS. DE MULLIN

I don't think I've noticed any falling off.

MRS. CLOUSTON

It is there all the same. I'm sure Hugo would



agree with me. Of course, curates are paid next to nothing. Still, I think the Vicar might be more happy in his choice.

MRS. DE MULLIN

I believe the poor like him.

MRS. CLOUSTON

*(to whom this seems of small importance compared with his shocking social disabilities)*

Very likely. . . . Do please keep still, Jane, and don't fidget with that book. What is the matter with you?

MRS. DE MULLIN

I'm a little nervous this morning. Hugo's illness . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON

Hugo's almost well now.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Still the anxiety . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON

Nonsense, Jane. Anxiety is not at all a thing to give way to, especially when there's no longer anything to be anxious about. Hugo's practically well now. Dr. Rolt seems to have frightened us all quite unnecessarily.

MRS. DE MULLIN

I suppose it's difficult to tell.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Of course, it's difficult. Otherwise no one would send for a doctor. What are doctors for if they can't tell when a case is serious and when it is not?

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MRS. DE MULLIN

But if he didn't know ?

MRS. CLOUSTON

Then he *ought* to have known. Next time Hugo is ill you'd better send to Bridport. (MRS. DE MULLIN *drops book on table with a clatter.*) Really, Jane, what are you doing ? Throwing books about like that !

MRS. DE MULLIN

It slipped out of my hand.

[*Rises and goes up to window restlessly.*

MRS. CLOUSTON

Is anything wrong ?

MRS. DE MULLIN (*hesitating*)

Well, the truth is I've done something, Harriet, and now I'm not sure whether I ought to have done it.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Done what ?

MRS. DE MULLIN (*dolorously*)

I'm afraid you won't approve.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Perhaps you'd better tell me what it is. Then we shall know.

MRS. DE MULLIN

The fact is some one is coming here this morning, Harriet—to see Hugo.

MRS. CLOUSTON

To see Hugo ? Who is it ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Janet.

MRS. CLOUSTON (*with horror*)

Janet ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Yes.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Janet ! She wouldn't *dare* !

MRS. DE MULLIN (*dolorously*)

I sent for her, Harriet.

MRS. CLOUSTON

You *sent* for her ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Yes. When Hugo was first taken ill and Dr. Rolt seemed to think the attack was so serious. . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON

Dr. Rolt was a fool.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Very likely, Harriet. But he said Hugo might die. And he said if there was any one Hugo would wish to see. . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON

But would Hugo wish to see Janet ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

I thought he might. After all Janet *is* his daughter.

MRS. CLOUSTON

I thought he said he would never see her again ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

He did *say* that, of course. But that was eight years ago. And, of course, he wasn't ill then.

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MRS. CLOUSTON

When did you send for her ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Three days ago.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Why didn't she come *then*, if she was coming at all ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

She was away from home. That was so unfortunate. If she had come when Hugo was ill in bed it might have been all right. But now that he's almost well again. . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON

When did you hear she was coming ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Only this morning. Here is what she says..

[*Produces telegram from pocket.*

MRS. CLOUSTON (*reads*)

"Telegram delayed. Arrive mid-day. Seagrave."  
Seagrave ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Yes. She calls herself Mrs. Seagrave now.

MRS. CLOUSTON (*nods*)

On account of the child, I suppose.

MRS. DE MULLIN

I suppose so.

MRS. CLOUSTON

I never could understand how Janet came to go so wrong. (Mrs. DE MULLIN *sighs*.) None of the *De Mullins* have ever done such a thing before.



MRS. DE MULLIN (*plaintively*)

I'm sure she doesn't get it from *my* family.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Well, she must have got it from *somewhere*. She's not in the least like a De Mullin.

MRS. DE MULLIN (*lamentably*)

I believe it was all through bicycling.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Bicycling ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Yes. When girls usen't to scour about the country as they do now these things didn't happen.

MRS. CLOUSTON (*severely*)

I never approved of Janet's bicycling you remember, Jane.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Nor did I, Harriet. But it was no use. Janet only laughed. Janet never would do what she was told about things even when she was quite a child. She was so very obstinate. She was always getting some idea or other into her head. And when she did nothing would prevent her from carrying it out. At one time she wanted to *teach*.

MRS. CLOUSTON

I remember.

MRS. DE MULLIN.

She said girls ought to go out and earn their own living like boys.

MRS. CLOUSTON

What nonsense !

MRS. DE MULLIN

So Hugo said. But Janet wouldn't listen. Finally we had to let her go over and teach the Aldenham girls French three times a week, just to keep her amused.

MRS. CLOUSTON (*thoughtfully*)

It was strange you never could find out who the father was.

MRS. DE MULLIN (*sighs*)

Yes. She wouldn't tell us.

MRS. CLOUSTON

You should have made her tell you. Hugo should have insisted on it.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Hugo did insist. He was terribly angry with her. He sent her to her room and said she was not to come down till she told us. But it was no use. Janet just stayed in her room till we had all gone to bed and then took the train to London.

MRS. CLOUSTON

You should have locked her door.

MRS. DE MULLIN

We did. She got out of the window.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Got out of the window! The girl might have been killed.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Yes. But Janet was always fond of climbing. And she was never afraid of anything.

MRS. CLOUSTON

But there's no late train to London.

MRS. DE MULLIN

She caught the mail at Weymouth, I suppose.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Do you mean to say she *walked* all the way to Weymouth in the middle of the night? Why, it's twelve miles.

MRS. DE MULLIN

She had her bicycle as I said.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Tck! . . . How did you know she went to London?

MRS. DE MULLIN

She wrote from there, for her things.

MRS. CLOUSTON

I wonder she wasn't ashamed.

MRS. DE MULLIN

So Hugo said. However, he said I might send them. But he made me send a letter with the things to say that he would have nothing more to do with her and that she was not to write again. For a time she didn't write. Nearly five months. Then, when her baby was born, she wrote to tell me. That was how I knew she had taken the name of Seagrave. She mentioned it.

MRS. CLOUSTON.

Did you show the letter to Hugo?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Yes.

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MRS. CLOUSTON

What did he say ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Nothing. He just read it and gave it back to me without a word.

MRS. CLOUSTON

That's the last you've heard of her, I suppose ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Oh no, Harriet.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Do you mean to say she goes *on* writing ? And you allow her ? When Hugo said she was not to ?

MRS. DE MULLIN (*meekly*)

Yes. Not often, Harriet. Only occasionally.

MRS. CLOUSTON

She has no business to write at all.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Her letters are quite short. Sometimes I wish they were longer. They really tell one nothing about herself, though I often ask her.

MRS. CLOUSTON

You *ask* her ! Then *you* write too !

MRS. DE MULLIN

I answer her letters, of course. Otherwise she wouldn't go on writing.

MRS. CLOUSTON.

Really, Jane, I'm surprised at you. So you've



actually been corresponding with Janet all these years—and never told *me*! I think you've behaved very badly.

MRS. DE MULLIN

I didn't like to, Harriet.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Didn't like to!

MRS. DE MULLIN

And as you don't think I *ought* to hear from her. . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON

I don't think you ought to hear from her, of course. But as you do hear naturally I should like to have seen the letters.

MRS. DE MULLIN

I didn't know that, Harriet. In fact, I thought you would rather not. When a dreadful thing like this happens in a family it seems best not to write about it or to speak of it either, doesn't it? Hugo and I never speak of it.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Does Hugo know you hear from her?

MRS. DE MULLIN

I think not. I have never told him. Nor Hester. I'm sure Hester would disapprove.

MRS. CLOUSTON

My dear Jane, what *can* it matter whether Hester approves or not? Hester knows nothing about such things. At *her* age!

MRS. DE MULLIN

Hester is twenty-eight.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Exactly. A girl like that.

MRS. DE MULLIN (*sighs*)

Girls have such very strong opinions nowadays.

MRS. CLOUSTON

What does Janet live on? Teaching?

MRS. DE MULLIN

I suppose so. She had her Aunt Miriam's legacy, of course.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Only four hundred pounds.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Yes.

MRS. CLOUSTON

I never approved of that legacy, Jane. Girls oughtn't to have money left them. It makes them too independent.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Aunt Miriam was always so fond of Janet.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Then she should have left the money to Hugo. Fathers are the proper people to leave money to.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Hugo did have the *management* of the money—till Janet was twenty-one.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Why only till she was twenty-one ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

It was so in Aunt Miriam's will. Of course, Hugo would have gone on managing it for her. It was very little trouble as it was all in Consols. But Janet said she would rather look after it for herself.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Ridiculous ! As if girls could possibly manage money !

MRS. DE MULLIN

So Hugo said. But Janet insisted. So she got her way.

MRS. CLOUSTON

What did she do with it ? Spend it ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

No. Put it into a Railway, she said.

MRS. CLOUSTON

A Railway ! How dangerous !

MRS. DE MULLIN

She said she would prefer it. She said Railways sometimes went up. Consols never.

MRS. CLOUSTON

She lost it all, of course ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

I don't know, Harriet.

MRS. CLOUSTON

You don't *know* ?

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MRS. DE MULLIN

No. I never liked to ask. Hugo was rather hurt about the whole thing, so the subject was never referred to.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Let me see. The child must be eight years old by now.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Just eight. It will be nine years next March since Janet went away.

MRS. CLOUSTON

What did she call him?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Johnny.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Johnny! None of the De Mullins have ever been called *Johnny*.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Perhaps it was his father's name.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Perhaps so (*pause*).

MRS. DE MULLIN

Do you think I ought to tell Hugo about Janet's coming?

MRS. CLOUSTON

Certainly.

MRS. DE MULLIN

I thought perhaps. . . .



MRS. CLOUSTON

Nonsense, Jane. Of course, he must be told. You ought to have told him from the very beginning?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Do you mean when I sent the telegram? But Hugo was unconscious.

MRS. CLOUSTON

As soon as he recovered consciousness then.

MRS. DE MULLIN

I did mean to. But he seemed so weak, and Dr. Rolt said any excitement. . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON

Dr. Rolt!

MRS. DE MULLIN (*goaded*)

Well, I couldn't tell that Dr. Rolt knew so little about Hugo's illness, could I? And I was afraid of the shock.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Still, he should have been told at once. It was the only chance.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Yes. I see that now. But I was afraid of the shock, as I said. So I put it off. And then, when I didn't hear from Janet, I thought I would wait.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Why?

MRS. DE MULLIN

You see I didn't know whether she was coming.

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And if she didn't come, of course there was no necessity for telling Hugo anything about it. I'm afraid he'll be very angry.

MRS. CLOUSTON

At any rate, you must tell him now. The sooner the better.

MRS. DE MULLIN (*meekly*)

Very well, Harriet. If you think so.

MRS. CLOUSTON

You had better go up to him at once.

[MRS. DE MULLIN *goes to the door on the left, opens it, then draws back hastily.*

MRS. DE MULLIN

Here is Hugo. He's just coming across the hall. With Hester. How unlucky.

MRS. CLOUSTON

I don't see that it matters.

MRS. DE MULLIN

I'd rather not have told him before Hester.

[MRS. CLOUSTON *shrugs her shoulders. A moment later HUGO enters. He leans on a stick and HESTER's arm. He looks weak and pale and altogether extremely sorry for himself, obviously a nervous and a very tiresome patient.*

HESTER

Carefully, father. That's right. Will you lie on the sofa?

DE MULLIN (*fretfully*)

No. Put me in the armchair. I'm tired of lying down.

HESTER

Very well. Let me help you. There. Wait a moment. I'll fetch you some pillows.

[*Props him up on pillows in an armchair.*]

DE MULLIN

Thank you.

[*Lies back exhausted and closes his eyes.*]

MRS. DE MULLIN (*going to him*)

How are you feeling now, Hugo?

DE MULLIN

Very weak.

MRS. DE MULLIN

I wonder if you ought to have come down?

DE MULLIN

It won't make any difference. Nothing will make any difference any more, Jane. I shan't last much longer. I'm worn out.

HESTER

Father!

DE MULLIN

Yes, Hester. Worn out (*with a sort of melancholy pride*). None of the De Mullins have been strong. I'm the last of them. The last of the De Mullins.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Come, Hugo, you mustn't talk in that morbid way.

DE MULLIN

I'm not morbid, Harriet. But I feel tired, tired.

MRS. DE MULLIN

You'll be better in a day or two.

DE MULLIN

No, Jane. I shall never be better. Never in *this* world (*pause*).

MRS. DE MULLIN (*nervously*)

Hugo . . . there's something . . . something I have to tell you. . . .

DE MULLIN

What is it, Jane ? (*fretfully*). What have you been keeping from me ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

I ought to have told you before. Only I didn't like . . .

DE MULLIN

Is it something about my illness ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Oh no, Hugo.

DE MULLIN (*relieved*)

I thought Dr. Rolt might have said something.

MRS. DE MULLIN

It's nothing of that kind.

DE MULLIN (*peevishly*)

Well, well, what is it ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Hugo, some one is coming here to-day, to see *you*.



DE MULLIN

To see *me*? Who?

MRS. DE MULLIN

You won't be angry, Hugo?

DE MULLIN (*testily*)

How can I possibly say that, Jane, when I don't know who it is?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Hugo, it's . . . (*Bell rings loudly.*) Harriet, there's the bell! I wonder if it's she? Do you think it is?

[*All look towards the door on the right, expectantly.*]

DE MULLIN (*querulously*)

Well, Jane? Am I to hear who this visitor is or am I not?

ELLEN (*showing in a lady leading a little boy by the hand*)  
Mrs. Seagrave.

[*Enter JANET and JOHNNY L. JANET is a very handsome woman of six-and-thirty. She is admirably dressed, but her clothes are quiet and in excellent taste, dark in colour and plain in cut but expensive. Her hat is particularly tasteful, but also quiet. Her clothes are in marked contrast to those of her mother and sister which are of the homeliest description and were probably made in the village. JOHNNY is a well-grown youngster of eight in a sailor suit.*]

HESTER (*shocked*)

Mother !

DE MULLIN

Janet, my dear ! (*cry of welcome*).

JANET

Father ! (*Drops JOHNNY'S hand, comes rapidly to him, falls on one knee and kisses him impulsively, patting his left hand with her right.*) How are you ? Better ? (*holding out her left hand to her mother but still kneeling*). How do you do, mother dear ? (*Mrs. DE MULLIN takes it. Puts her other hand on JANET'S shoulder.*) I should have come before, father, directly you sent for me. But your telegram was delayed. I was away from home.

DE MULLIN (*nods*)

I see.

JANET

Have you been very ill, father ? And did you frighten them all dreadfully ? How naughty of you !

DE MULLIN

Silly Janet ! Let me look at you, my dear. (*Looks at her face as she holds it up.*) You're not much changed, Janet.

JANET

Nor are you, father.

DE MULLIN

A little greyer, perhaps.

JANET

No ! Not a hair !

DE MULLIN

Well, my dear, I'm glad you've come. We parted in anger, but that's all over now. Forgotten and forgiven. Eh?

JANET

Yes. Forgotten and forgiven (*rises*). How are you, Aunt Harriet? I didn't see you. (*Eagerly*) Hester!

[*Goes to her impulsively, holding out her hand. Hester takes it coldly. JANET tries to draw her towards her. HESTER resists. She drops her hand and HESTER turns away.*]

DE MULLIN

Who is that? (*pointing to JOHNNY*).

JANET (*turning to him*)

That is Johnny. My son.

DE MULLIN

My grandson?

JANET

Yes. I *had* to bring him, father. We were away from home and there was no one to leave him with.

DE MULLIN

I'm glad you brought him. Come here, Johnny. Don't be afraid.

JOHNNY (*in his confident treble*)

I'm not afraid. Why should I be afraid?

[*Goes to him.*]

DE MULLIN (*taking his hand*)

Say "How do you do, grandfather."

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JOHNNY

How do you do, grandfather?

DE MULLIN

Will you give me a kiss, Johnny?

JOHNNY

If you like, grandfather.

[*Kisses him.*

DE MULLIN

That's a good boy.

JANET

Kiss your grandmother too, Johnny.

[*Mrs. DE MULLIN snatches him up and kisses him passionately. Then holds him a little way off and looks at him admiringly.*

MRS. DE MULLIN

What a fine little fellow, Janet!

JANET (*proudly*)

Isn't he, mother? And *so* strong and healthy! He's hardly had a day's illness since he was born.

JOHNNY (*who has been staring at the pictures on the walls, holding his grandmother by one hand*).

Who are all these old men, grandfather?

DE MULLIN

Your ancestors, my boy.

JOHNNY

What's ancestors?

DE MULLIN

Your forefathers. Your mother's forefathers,



JOHNNY

Is that old man in the wig an ancestor ?

DE MULLIN

Yes. That is Anthony De Mullin, your great-great-grandfather.

JOHNNY

What was *he* ?

DE MULLIN (*puzzled*)

*What* was he ? I don't know that he was anything in particular. He was just a gentleman.

JOHNNY (*disappointed*)

Is that all ?

DE MULLIN

Don't make any mistake, my boy. It's a great thing to be descended from gentle-people, a thing to be proud of and to be thankful for.

JOHNNY

Mother says the great thing is for every one to be of some use in the world. Are gentle-people of more use in the world than other people, grandfather ?

DE MULLIN

Certainly.

JOHNNY

And were all these old men gentle-people ?

DE MULLIN

All of them. And you must grow up like them.

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JOHNNY

They're very *ugly*, grandfather (*pause*). What did they *do*?

DE MULLIN

They lived down here at Brendon.

JOHNNY

Nothing else?

DE MULLIN

They looked after their land.

JOHNNY

Had they much land?

DE MULLIN

A great deal. At one time the De Mullins owned all the land about here.

JOHNNY

How much do they own now?

DE MULLIN (*sighs*)

Not very much, I'm afraid.

JOHNNY

Then they can't have looked after it very well, can they, grandfather?

MRS. DE MULLIN (*feeling the strain of this conversation*)

Now, Hugo, do you think you ought to talk any more? Why not go upstairs for a little and lie down?

DE MULLIN

Perhaps I will, Jane. I *am* a little tired.

HESTER

Shall I go with father?

MRS. DE MULLIN.

No. I will. Come, Hugo (*helps him up*).

DE MULLIN

Will you come, with me, Johnny?

MRS. DE MULLIN (*hastily*)

No, Hugo. He will only disturb you. Stay down here, Johnny, with your mother. Now then. Carefully.

[*Leads DE MULLIN off by the door on the left. There is a pause, during which the remaining occupants of the room obviously have nothing in particular to say to each other. At last MRS. CLOUSTON speaks.*]

MRS. CLOUSTON

Well, Janet, how have you been all these years?

JANET (*nonchalantly*)

All right, Aunt Harriet. And you?

MRS. CLOUSTON

Pretty well, thanks.

JANET

Are you still living down at Bath?

MRS. CLOUSTON

Yes. You live in London, Jane tells me.

JANET

Yes.

MRS. CLOUSTON

What do you do there? Teach?

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JANET

Oh no. Why should I be teaching ?

MRS. CLOUSTON

Jane said you wanted to teach at one time.

JANET

That was years ago. Before I left Brendon. I soon gave up that idea. No. I keep a shop.

MRS. CLOUSTON

A shop !

JANET

Yes. A hat-shop.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Good heavens ! A De Mullin in a hat-shop !

JANET (*a little maliciously*)

Not a De Mullin, Aunt Harriet. A Seagrave.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Did Mr. Seagrave keep a hat-shop ?

JANET

Mr. Seagrave ? . . . oh, I see. No. It's not a man's hat shop. It's a lady's (*takes off hat*). This is one of ours. What do you think of it, Hester ?

HESTER (*frostily*)

It looks very expensive.

JANET (*looking at it critically*)

Yes, I own I'm rather pleased with it.

MRS. CLOUSTON (*acidly*)

You seem to be able to *dress* very well altogether, in spite of the shop.



JANET (*correcting her*)

Because of it, Aunt Harriet. That's the advantage of being what is called "in trade." If I were a school teacher or a governess or something genteel of that kind I could only afford to dress like a pauper. But as I keep a shop I can dress like a lady. Clothes are a question of money, after all, aren't they?

MRS. CLOUSTON (*contemptuously*)

If one is in a shop it doesn't matter *how* one dresses.

JANET

On the contrary if one is in a shop it matters a great deal. A girl in a shop *must* dress well. The business demands it. If you ever start a hat-shop, Aunt Harriet, you'll have to dress very differently. Otherwise nobody will buy your hats.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Indeed? Fortunately I've no intention of starting a shop of any kind.

JANET (*blandly*)

No? Well, I expect you're wise. I doubt if you'd make a success of it.

[*Loud ring heard off.*]

MRS. CLOUSTON (*rather flustered—gasps*)

Hester! I hope that's not a visitor. (JANET *stares. Then laughs good-humouredly.* AUNT HARRIET'S *nervous desire to keep her out of the way of visitors strikes her as amusing.*) What are you laughing at, Janet?

JANET (*shrugs*)

Nothing, Aunt Harriet.

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ELLEN (*showing in*)

Miss Deanes. Mr. Brown.

[MISS DEANES is a bulky, red-faced, short-sighted woman of forty-two, very fussy and absurd in manner, who talks very fast. BROWN carries a book.

MISS DEANES

How do you do, Mrs. Clouston. *Such* a piece of news! I felt I *must* tell you. I brought Mr. Brown with me. He was just leaving a book for you, Hester, so I made him come in.

[*Shakes hands with* HESTER.

BROWN

Here it is, Miss DE MULLIN. It's the one you wanted to borrow. *Blore on the Creeds.*

HESTER

Thank you.

MISS DEANES (*seeing JANET for first time*)

Janet! Is that you?

JANET

Yes, Miss Deanes. How are you?

[*Shakes hands.*

MISS DEANES

Good gracious, child, when did you come? Why, you've not been down to Brendon for years.

JANET

It is a long time, isn't it?

MISS DEANES

And who is this young gentleman ?

[*Noticing JOHNNY who is holding JANET's hand and staring at MISS DEANES.*

JANET (*calmly*)

That is my son. Shake hands with Miss Deanes, Johnny.

MISS DEANES (*astonished*)

Your son ! There now ! And I never knew you were even married !

JANET (*quite at her ease*)

Didn't you ?

MISS DEANES

No.

MRS. CLOUSTON (*nervously*)

I forgot. I haven't introduced you. Mr. Brown—Mrs. Seagrave.

BROWN (*bows*)

How do you do.

MRS. CLOUSTON (*turning to MISS DEANES again*)

And now what *is* your piece of news, Miss Deanes ?

MISS DEANES (*volubly*)

Oh yes. I *must* tell you. You'd never guess. Somebody *else* is engaged to be married. (*to JANET*) *Who* do you think ?

JANET

I've no idea.

MISS DEANES

Bertha Aldenham—to Mr. Bulstead.

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JANET (*starts*)

Mr. Bulstead ?

MISS DEANES

Yes. But I forgot. *You* wouldn't know *them*. They didn't come here till long after you went away. They bought Brendon Park from the Malcolms three years ago. You remember the Malcolms, Janet ?

JANET (*whose attention has wandered*)

Eh ? Oh yes, of course.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Which Mr. Bulstead is it ? The eldest ?

MISS DEANES

Yes. Montague.

JANET (*under her breath*)

Monty Bulstead ! Engaged !

MRS. CLOUSTON

Are the Aldenhams pleased ?

MISS DEANES

Very, I expect. The Bulsteads are so rich, you see.

JANET

Does he live down here ; this Mr. Montagu Bulstead, I mean ?

MISS DEANES

Oh no. He's here on leave. He's in the army. He only got back three months ago (*with a little giggle*). He and Bertha haven't taken long to settle things, have they ?

JANET

No, they haven't taken long.



MISS DEANES

But I dare say he *will* live here when he's married. As the Bulsteads are so rich. The father makes frilling and lace and so on. All those things people used to make so much better by hand. And Bertha may not care about army life. I know *I* shouldn't. (JANET smiles discreetly.) It's not always very nice, is it?

BROWN (*to Johnny who has been staring at him round-eyed across the room, with heavy geniality*).

Well, young man. Who are you staring at, eh? Do you want to talk to me?

JOHNNY (*quite simply, in his high piping treble*)  
No, thank you.

JANET

Sh! Johnny! You don't mean that. Go to Mr. Brown when he speaks to you.

JOHNNY

Very well, Mummie.

[*Does so slowly.*]

BROWN (*taking his hands*)

Now then what shall *we* talk about, you and I?

JOHNNY

I don't know.

BROWN

Don't you? Suppose we see if you can say your catechism then? Would you like *that*?

JOHNNY

What's catechism?

BROWN

Come, Johnny, I'm sure your mother has taught you your catechism. Can you repeat your "Duty towards your Neighbour"? (JOHNNY *shakes his head emphatically*). Try "My duty towards my neighbour. . . ."

JOHNNY

Mother says it's every one's duty to be healthy and to be happy. Is that what you mean?

BROWN (*scandalized*)

No! No!

JOHNNY

Well, that's what mother taught me.

JANET (*coming to the rescue*)

I'm afraid he doesn't know his catechism yet, Mr. Brown. You see he's only eight. (BROWN *bows stiffly*.) Run away, Johnny, and play in the garden for a little.

[*Leads him to the door in the bay.*]

JOHNNY

All right, Mummie.

[JOHNNY *runs out into the garden. A certain relief is perceptible on his departure. It is felt that his interview with MR. BROWN has not been a success.*]

MISS DEANES (*who feels that a change of subject will be only tactful*)

There now, Hester! I do believe you've never asked after Dicky! He'll be *so* offended!

HESTER (*smiling*)

Has Dicky been ill again? I thought you said he was better yesterday.

MISS DEANES

He was. But he had a relapse, poor *darling*. I had to sit up all last night with him!

JANET

What has been the matter with him?

MISS DEANES

Some sort of chill, Dr. Rolt said. I was *dreadfully* anxious.

JANET

What a pity! Colds are such troublesome things for children.

MISS DEANES (*puzzled*)

Children?

JANET

Yes. You were speaking of a child, weren't you?

MISS DEANES

Oh no. Dicky is my *cockatoo*. He's the *sweetest* bird. Talks quite like a human being. And never a coarse expression. That's so unusual with cockatoos.

JANET

Indeed?

MISS DEANES

Yes. The voyage, you see. They come all the way from South America and generally they pick up the most dreadful language, poor lambs—from the sailors.

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But Dicky didn't. He has such a pure mind (*rising*). And now I really must be going. I have all kinds of people I want to tell about Mr. Bulstead's engagement.

[*Shaking hands with* MRS. CLOUSTON *and* JANET.

BROWN

I must be off too. Wait one moment, Miss Deanes. Good-bye, Mrs. Clouston.

[*Shakes hands with* MRS. CLOUSTON *and bows stiffly to* JANET. *He has not yet forgiven* JOHNNY *for not knowing his catechism.*

(*To* HESTER.) Good-bye, Miss De Mullin. Shall I see you at Evensong?

[*Shakes hands with* HESTER.

HESTER

I expect so.

[*Brown and Miss Deanes go out.*

JANET

Poof!

MRS. CLOUSTON

Janet!

JANET

What a fool Miss Deanes is!

MRS CLOUSTON (*indifferently*)

She always was, wasn't she?

JANET

I suppose so. Going on in that way about her ridiculous cockatoo! And that *hideous* little curate!

HESTER

I don't see why you should sneer at all my friends.

JANET

Are they your friends, Hester? Then I won't sneer at them. But you can't call Mr. Brown *handsome*, can you?

HESTER

Mr. Brown is a very good man and works very hard among the poor. That's better than being handsome.

JANET

Yes. But less agreeable, isn't it? However, if you like him there's an end of it. But he needn't have begun asking Johnny his catechism the very first time he met him. *I don't call it good manners.*

HESTER

How was he to know the poor child was being brought up to be a little heathen?

*[Takes up her hat and cape and begins putting them on.]*

JANET (*sbrugs*)

How, indeed!

MRS. CLOUSTON

Are you going out, Hester? Lunch will be ready in half an hour.

HESTER

Only to take Mrs. Wason her soup, Aunt Harriet.

JANET (*looking curiously at HESTER*)

Do you want to marry Mr. Brown, Hester?

MRS. CLOUSTON

My dear Janet!

JANET

Well, Aunt Harriet, there's nothing to be ashamed of if she does. Do you, Hester?



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HESTER

Why do you ask such a question ?

JANET

Never mind. Only answer it (*pause*). You do like him, don't you ?

HESTER

I've a great respect for Mr. Brown.

JANET

Don't blush, my dear. I dare say that's much the same thing.

HESTER

I won't talk to you about it. You only sneer.

JANET

I wasn't sneering. Come, Hester, don't be cross. Why shouldn't we be friends ? I might help you.

HESTER

How could *you* help me ?

JANET (*looking quizzically at poor HESTER's headgear*)

I might make you a hat, my dear.

HESTER

Mr. Brown doesn't notice those things.

JANET

All men notice those things, Hester.

HESTER (*with a sneer*)

I suppose that's why *you* wear such fine clothes.

JANET (*quite good-humoured*)

That's it. Fine feathers make fine birds.

HESTER

Well, *I* call it shameless.

JANET

My dear Hester, you're always being ashamed of things. You always were, I remember. What is there to be ashamed of in that ? What on earth were women given pretty faces and pretty figures for if not to make men admire them and want to marry them ?

HESTER (*acidly*)

Well, *your* plan hasn't been very successful so far, anyhow !

JANET (*quietly*)

Nor has yours, Hester.

[HESTER *makes exclamation of impatience and seems about to reply angrily. Then thinks better of it and goes out without a word. JANET follows her retreat with her eyes and smiles half cynically, half compassionately. The Curtain falls.*

## ACT II

SCENE : *On the edge of Brendon Forest.*

*Time : three days later. A road runs along the back of the stage from which it is separated by a fence and high hedge. In this but somewhat to the right is a stile and also a gate. Round the trunk of a large tree to the left is a rough wooden seat. The stage is empty when the curtain rises. Then ENTER MRS. DE MULLIN, JANET and JOHNNY. They approach stile from the left and come through gate. There is an EXIT on the right of the stage through the Forest.*

JANET

I don't think I'll come any farther, mother.

MRS. DE MULLIN

You won't come up to the house ?

JANET

No, thanks (*rather grimly*). I don't want to see Mrs. Bulstead. And I'm sure Mrs. Bulstead doesn't want to see me.

MRS. DE MULLIN

I wish Hester could have come.

JANET

Why couldn't she ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

She's at the church putting up the decorations.  
It's the Harvest Thanksgiving to-morrow.

JANET (*laughing*)

Mr. Brown !

MRS. DE MULLIN

Janet, I told you you weren't to laugh at Hester  
about Mr. Brown. It's not kind.

JANET (*lightly*)

It's all right mother. Hester's not here.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Still, I don't like it, dear. It's not quite . . .

JANET (*soothing her*)

Not quite *nice*. I know, mother. Not the way  
really refined and ladylike young women talk. But  
I'm only quite a common person who sells hats. You  
can't expect all these refinements from *me* !

[MRS. DE MULLIN *sighs*.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Are you going to turn back ?

JANET

Not at once. I'll wait for you here a little with  
Johnny in case they're out. Why, they've put a seat  
here. [*She sits on the side farthest from the road.*

MRS. DE MULLIN

Usen't there to be one ?

JANET

No. Nor a gate in my time. Only a stile.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Very likely, dear. I don't remember. I don't often come this way.

JANET (*nods*)

I often used to come along it in the old days.

MRS. DE MULLIN

I dare say. Well, I must be getting on to my call or I shall be late. You're sure you won't come ?

JANET

Quite, mother. Good-bye.

[MRS. DE MULLIN *goes off through the forest.*

JOHNNY

Where's grandmother going, Mummie ?

JANET

Up to the big house.

JOHNNY

What big house ?

JANET

Brendon Park.

JOHNNY

Mayn't I go up to the big house too ?

JANET

No, dear. You're to stay with mother.



JOHNNY

Who lives at the big house ?

JANET

Nobody you know, dear.

JOHNNY

That's why I asked, Mummie.

JANET

Well, don't ask any more, sonny. Mother's rather tired. Run away and play, there's a good boy.

[Kisses him.

JOHNNY

Very well, Mummie.

[JOHNNY disappears into the wood. JANET falls into a brown study. Presently a foot-step is heard coming along the road, but she seems to notice nothing. Then a young man climbs over the stile. He starts as he sees her and draws back, then advances eagerly, holding out his hand.

JANET

Monty !

MONTY

Janet, is that you !

JANET (smiling)

Yes, Monty.

MONTY (astonished)

Janet ! Here !

JANET

Yes, Monty.

MONTY (*nodding over his shoulder*)

Our stile, Janet!

JANET

Our stile.

MONTY (*nods*)

The stile where you and I first met.

JANET (*relapsing for a moment into something like sentiment*)

Yes. I thought I must see it again—for the sake of old times.

MONTY

How long ago it all seems!

JANET (*matter of fact*)

It is a longish time, you know.

MONTY (*thoughtfully*)

I believe that was the happiest month of my life, Janet.

JANET

Was it, Monty?

MONTY

Yes (*pause*). I say, when did you come down? You don't *live* at home any longer, do you?

JANET

No. I only came down three days ago.

MONTY

By Jove it is good to see you again. Why, it's eight years since we used to be together, you and I.

JANET

Nearly nine.

MONTY

Yes . . . You're not coming to live down here again, are you ?

JANET

No : why ?

MONTY

I thought perhaps . . .

JANET (*cynically*)

Would you dislike it very much if I did, Monty ?

MONTY

Of course not.

JANET

Confess. You *did* feel it would be rather awkward ?

MONTY

Well, of course . . .

JANET

However you can set your mind at rest. I'm not.

*[His relief at this intelligence enables him to realize the pleasure he is getting from seeing her again.]*

MONTY

I say, Janet, how well you're looking ! I believe you're handsomer than ever.

JANET (*smiling*)

Am I ?

MONTY

You know you are.

[*Pause. He looks at her admiringly. She turns away with a little smile.*]

JANET (*feeling that they are getting on to dangerous ground*)

Well, Monty. Where have you been these eight years ?

MONTY

Abroad with my regiment. We've been ordered all over the place. I've been home on leave, of course. But not for the last three years. Not since father bought the Park. I've never been at Brendon since . . . (*pause*).

JANET

Since *we* were here ? Don't blush, Monty. (*He nods shamefacedly.*) How did he come to buy the place ?

MONTY

It was just a chance. He saw it advertised, came and looked at it and bought it. He's no idea I was ever at Brendon before (*rather bitter laugh*). None of them have. I have to pretend not to know my way about.

JANET

Why ?

MONTY

It seems safer. (*JANET nods.*) Sometimes I almost forget to keep it up. I'm such a duffer about things. But I've managed hitherto. And now, of course, it's

all right as I've been here three months. I may be supposed to know the beastly place by this time.

JANET

Beastly? You're not very polite.

[MONTY *laughs shamefacedly.*

MONTY

You got my note, didn't you?

JANET

What note? . . . Oh, eight years ago, you mean? Yes.

MONTY

I left it with the woman at the lodgings. As you were coming over that afternoon, I thought it safer than sending a message. And of course I daren't telegraph. (JANET *nods.*) I was awfully sick at having to go away like that. All in a moment. Without even saying good-bye. But I had to.

JANET

Of course. Was your mother badly hurt?

MONTY

No. Only stunned. That was such rot. If people get chucked out of a carriage they must expect to get stunned. But of course they couldn't know. The telegram just said "Mother hurt. Carriage accident. Come at once." It got to me at the lodgings a couple of hours before you were coming. I had just time to chuck my things into a bag and catch the train. I wanted to come back after the mater was all right again. But I couldn't very well, could I?



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JANET

Why not ?

MONTY

Well, the regiment was to sail in less than three weeks and the mater would have thought it rather rough if I'd gone away again. I'd been away six weeks as it was.

JANET

Oh yes. Of course.

MONTY (*with half a sigh*)

To think if I hadn't happened to be riding along that road and seen you at the stile and asked my way, you and I might never have met. What a chance life is !

JANET (*nods*)

Just a chance (*pause*).

MONTY

Why did you go away, Janet ? You weren't going the last time I saw you.

JANET

Wasn't I ?

MONTY

No. At least you said nothing about it.

JANET

I didn't know I was going then. Not for certain.

MONTY

Why *did* you go ?

JANET (*quietly*)

I had to, Monty.

MONTY (*puzzled*)

You had to ? (JANET *nods*.) But why ?

JANET

Mother found out.

MONTY

About us ?

JANET

Yes. And she told father.

MONTY (*genuinely distressed*)

Oh, Janet ! I'm so sorry.

JANET (*shrugs*)

It couldn't be helped.

MONTY

Does he know who it was ?

JANET

Who *you* were ? No.

MONTY

You didn't tell him ?

JANET

Monty ! As if I should.

MONTY

I don't know. Girls generally do.

JANET

I didn't.

MONTY

No. I suppose you wouldn't. But you're different from most girls. Do you know there was always something rather splendid about you, Janet ?

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JANET (*curtseys*)

Thank you.

MONTY

I wonder he didn't *make* you tell.

JANET

He did try of course. That was why I ran away.

MONTY

I see. Where did you go to ?

JANET

London.

MONTY

To London ? All alone ? (JANET *nods*.) Why did you do that ? And why didn't you let me know ?

JANET (*sbrugs*)

You were out of England by that time.

MONTY

But why London ?

JANET

I had to go somewhere. And it seemed better to go where I shouldn't be known. Besides it's easier to be lost sight of in a crowd.

MONTY

But what did you do when you got there ?

JANET (*calmly*)

I got a place in a shop, Monty.

MONTY

A shop ? You !

JANET

Yes, a hat-shop, in Regent Street. My dear Monty, don't gape like that. Hat-shops are perfectly respectable places. Almost too respectable to judge by the fuss two of them made about employing *me*.

MONTY

What do you mean?

JANET

Well, when I applied to them for work they naturally asked if I had ever worked in a hat-shop before. And when I said "No" they naturally asked why I wanted to begin. In the innocence of my heart I told them. Whereupon they at once refused to employ me—not in the politest terms.

MONTY

Poor Janet. What beastly luck! Still . . .

[*Hesitates.*

JANET

Yes, Monty?

MONTY

I mean naturally they couldn't be expected . . .

JANET

Monty!

MONTY (*flustered*)

At least I don't mean that exactly. Only . . .

[*Stops.*

JANET

My dear Monty, I quite understand what you mean. You needn't trouble to be explicit. Naturally they

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couldn't be expected to employ an abandoned person like me to trim hats. That was exactly their view.

MONTY

But I thought you said you *did* get a place in a shop ?

JANET

Yes. But not at either of *those* shops. They were *far* too virtuous.

MONTY

How did you do it ?

JANET

Told lies, Monty. I believe that's how most women get employment.

MONTY

Told lies ?

JANET

Yes. I invented a husband, recently deceased, bought several yards of crêpe and a wedding ring. This is the ring.

[*Takes off glove.*

MONTY

Oh, Janet, how beastly for you !

[JANET *shrugs.*

JANET (*laughing*)

Everything seems to be "Beastly" to you, Monty. Brendon and telling lies and lots of other things. Luckily I'm less superfine.

MONTY

Didn't they find out ?



JANET

No. That was why I decided to be a widow. It made inquiries more difficult.

MONTY

I should have thought it made them easier.

JANET

On the contrary. You can't cross-question a widow about a recent bereavement. If you do she cries. I always used to look tearful directly my husband's name was even mentioned. So they gave up mentioning it. Women are so boring when they will cry.

MONTY

They might have inquired from other people.

JANET

Why should they? Besides there was no one to inquire from. I called him Seagrave—and drowned him at sea. You can't ask questions of the sharks.

MONTY

Oh, Janet, how can you joke about it?

JANET

I couldn't—then. I wanted work too badly. But I can now—with your kind permission, I mean.

MONTY

And you've been at the shop ever since?

JANET

Not *that* shop. I was only there about six months—till baby was born, in fact . . .

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MONTY (*horrified*)

Janet, there was a baby!

JANET

Of course there was a baby.

MONTY

Oh, Janet! And you never wrote! Why didn't you write?

JANET

I did think of it. But on the whole I thought I wouldn't. It would have been no good.

MONTY

No good?

JANET

Not then. You were in India. I was in England.

MONTY

You ought to have written at once—directly your mother found out.

JANET

One week after you sailed, Monty (*defiantly*). Besides why should I write?

MONTY

Why? I could have married you, of course.

JANET

If I'd asked you, you mean? Thank you, my dear Monty.

MONTY

No, I don't. Of course I should have married you. I *must* have married you.

JANET (*looking at him thoughtfully*)

I wonder if you would.

MONTY

Certainly I should. I should have been bound in honour.

JANET

I see. Then I'm glad I never wrote.

MONTY

You're *glad*? Now?

JANET

Yes. I've done some foolish things in my life, Monty, but none quite so foolish as that. To marry a schoolboy, not because he loves you or wants to marry you but because he thinks he's "bound in honour." No, thank you.

MONTY

I don't mean that. You know I don't, Janet. I loved you, of course. That goes without saying. I'd have married you like a shot before, only the Governor would have made such a fuss. The Governor was so awfully straitlaced about this sort of thing. When I was sent away from Eton he made the most ghastly fuss.

JANET

Were you sent away from Eton for "this sort of thing"?

MONTY

Yes—at least I don't mean that either. But it was about a girl there. He was frightfully wild. He

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threatened to cut me off if I ever did such a thing again. Such rot! As if no one had ever been sent away from school before!

JANET (*reflectively*)

I didn't know you'd been sent away from Eton.

MONTY

Didn't you? I suppose I didn't like to tell you-- for fear of what you'd think (*bitterly*). I seem to have been afraid of everything in those days.

JANET

Not *everything*, Monty.

MONTY

Oh, you know what I mean. I was awfully afraid of the Governor, I remember. I suppose all boys are if their parents rag them too much. But I would have married you, Janet, if I'd known. I would honestly.

JANET (*blandly*)

What is the pay of a British subaltern, Monty?

MONTY

The Governor would have had to stump up, of course.

JANET

Poor Mr. Bulstead! He'd have *liked* that, I suppose? And what about your poor unhappy colonel? And all the other little subalterns?

MONTY (*obstinately*)

Still, you ought to have written.

JANET (*quietly*)

You never wrote.

MONTY

I couldn't. You know that. You never would let me. That was why I couldn't send that note to you to tell you I was going away. You said my letters would be noticed.

JANET

Yes. I forgot that. That's the result of having a father who is what is called old-fashioned.

MONTY

What do you mean?

JANET

All letters to the Manor House are delivered locked in a bag. They always have been since the Flood, I believe, or at least since the invention of the postal service. And, of course, father won't have it altered. So every morning there's the ritual of unlocking this absurd bag. No one is allowed to do that but father—unless he is ill. Then mother has the privilege. And of course he scrutinizes the outside of every letter and directly it's opened asks who it's from and what's inside it. Your letters would have been noticed at once.

MONTY

How beastly!

JANET

The penalty of having nothing to do, Monty.

MONTY

I know. What a mess the whole thing is!



JANET

Just so. No. There was no way out of it except the hat-shop.

MONTY (*remorsefully*)

It's awfully rough on you, Janet.

JANET

Never mind. I dare say I wasn't cut out for the wife of a subaltern, Monty; whereas I make excellent hats.

MONTY (*savagely*)

You're still making the d——d things?

JANET

Yes. Only at another shop. The Regent Street place had no room for me when I was well enough to go back to work. But the woman who kept it gave me a recommendation to a friend who was starting in Hanover Street. A most superior quarter for a hat-shop, Monty. In fact *the* superior quarter. Claude et Cie was the name.

(MONTY (*rather shocked*))

A *French* shop?

JANET

No more French than you are, Monty. It was kept by a Miss Hicks, one of the most thoroughly British people you can possibly imagine. But we called ourselves Claude et Cie in order to be able to charge people more for their hats. You can always charge fashionable women more for their clothes if you pretend to be French. It's one of the imbecilities of commerce. So poor dear Miss Hicks became

Madame Claude and none of our hats cost less than seven guineas.

MONTY

Do people buy hats at such a price?

JANET

Oh yes. Everybody in Society bought them. Claude et Cie was quite the rage that season. Nobody who was anybody went anywhere else.

MONTY

She must have made a great deal of money.

JANET

On the contrary. She made nothing at all and narrowly escaped bankruptcy.

MONTY

But I don't understand. If her hats were so dear and everybody bought them?

JANET

Everybody *bought* them but nobody *paid* for them. In the highest social circles I believe people never do pay for anything—certainly not for their clothes. At least, nobody paid Miss Hicks, and at the end of six months she was owed £1,200 and hadn't a penny to pay her rent.

MONTY

Why didn't she *make* them pay.

JANET

She did dun them, of course, but they only ordered more hats to keep her quiet which didn't help Miss Hicks much. And when she went on dunning them

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they said they should withdraw their custom. In fact, she was in a dilemma. If she let the bills run on she couldn't pay her rent. And if she asked her customers to pay their bills they ceased to be customers.

MONTY

How beastly!

JANET

Not again, Monty!

MONTY

What *did* she do?

JANET

She didn't do anything. She was too depressed. She used to sit in the back room where the hats were trimmed and weep over the materials, regardless of expense. Finally things came to a crisis. The landlord threatened to distrain for his rent. But just as it looked as if it was all over with Claude et Cie a capitalist came to the rescue. *I* was the capitalist.

MONTY

You?

JANET

Yes. I'd an old Aunt once who was fond of me and left me a legacy when I was seventeen. Four hundred pounds.

MONTY

That wouldn't go very far.

JANET

Four hundred pounds goes a longish way towards

setting up a shop. Besides, it was nearly five hundred by that time. My shares had gone up. Well, I and my five hundred pounds came to the rescue. I paid the rent and the most clamorous of the creditors, and Miss Hicks and I became partners.

MONTY

But what was the good of that if the business was worth nothing?

JANET

It was worth several hundred pounds to any one, who had the pluck to sue half the British aristocracy. I sued them. It was tremendous fun. They were simply furious. They talked as if they'd never been sued before! As for Miss Hicks she wept more than ever and said I'd ruined the business.

MONTY

Hadn't you?

JANET

That business. Yes. But with the £1,200—or as much of it as we could recover—we started a new one. A cheap hat-shop. Relatively cheap that is—for Hanover Street. We charged two guineas a hat instead of seven, 100 per cent. profit instead of . . . You can work it out for yourself. But then our terms were strictly cash, so we made no bad debts. That was my idea.

MONTY

But you said nobody ever paid for their hats.

JANET

Not in the highest social circles. But we drew our

customers from the middle classes who live in South Kensington and Bayswater, and are not too haughty to pay for a hat if they see a cheap one.

MONTY

But wasn't it a frightful risk?

JANET (*cheerfully*)

It was a risk, of course. But everything in life is a risk, isn't it? And it succeeded, as I felt sure it would. We're quite a prosperous concern now-a-days, and I go over to Paris four times a year to see the latest fashions. That, my dear Monty, is the history of Claude et Cie.

[*Pause.*]

MONTY

And you've never married, Janet?

JANET

No.

MONTY (*hesitates*)

Janet . . . is it because . . . ?

JANET

Because?

MONTY

Because you still care for *me*?

JANET

Monty, don't be vain.

MONTY (*repelled*)

I didn't mean it like that. Janet, don't laugh. Of course, I'm glad if you don't care any more. At least, I suppose I ought to be glad. It would have



been dreadful if you had gone on caring all these years and I not known. But did you ?

JANET

No, Monty. You may set your mind at rest. I didn't.

MONTY

You're sure ?

JANET

Quite. I had too many other things to think of.

MONTY

Do you mean that beastly shop ?

JANET (*quietly*)

I meant my baby.

MONTY

*Our* baby. Is it alive ?

JANET

Of course. What do you mean, Monty ?

MONTY

I thought, as you didn't say . . . (*thoughtfully*)  
Poor little beast ! (JANET *makes gesture of protest.*)  
Well, it's rough luck on the little beggar, isn't it ?  
What's become of him, Janet ?

JANET

What's *become* of him ! My dear Monty, what should have become of him ? He's quite alive as I said and particularly thriving.

MONTY

Do you mean he's *living* with you ! . . . But, of course, I forgot, you're supposed to be married.

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JANET (*correcting him*)

A widow, Monty. An inconsolable widow!

MONTY

Where is he? In London?

JANET

No. As a matter of fact he's probably not fifty yards away. Over there.

[*Points towards the wood.*]

MONTY (*jumping up*)

Janet! (*nervously looking round*).

JANET (*rallying him*)

Frightened, Monty?

MONTY

Of course not (*shamefacedly*).

JANET

Just a little?

MONTY (*regaining courage*)

Janet, let me see him.

JANET (*amused*)

Would you like to?

MONTY

Of course I should. He's *my* baby as well as yours if it comes to that. Do call him, Janet.

JANET

All right. (*calls*) Johnny! (*pause*) John . . . ny!  
(*To MONTY*) You mustn't tell him, you know.

MONTY

Of course not.

JOHNNY (*off R.*)

Yes, Mummie.

JANET

Come here for a minute. Mother wants to speak to you.

JOHNNY (*off*)

Very well, Mummie. (*Enters R.*). Oh, Mummie, I've found such a lot of rabbits. You must come and see them. (*Seeing MONTY for the first time, stares at him.*) Oh!

MONTY

Come here, youngster. Come and let me look at you. (*JOHNNY goes to him slowly. MONTY, grasping both hands, draws him to him, looking at him long and keenly.*) He's like you, Janet.

JANET

Is he?

MONTY

Yes. He has your eyes. So your name's Johnny, young man?

JOHNNY

Yes.

MONTY

Well, Johnny, will you give me a kiss? (*MONTY leans forward. He does so.*) That's right.

JOHNNY

And now, Mummie, come and look at my rabbits.

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JANET

Not yet, dear. Mother's busy just now.

JOHNNY

May I go back to them then ?

JANET

Yes.

MONTY

Suppose I won't let you go ?

JOHNNY

I'll make you—and so will Mummie.

MONTY

Plucky little chap. Off with you.

[*Kisses him again, then releases his hands.*

JOHNNY trots off R. again. MONTY follows him with his eyes. Pause.

JANET

Well, Monty, what do you think of him ?

MONTY (*enthusiastic*)

I think he's *splendid*.

JANET (*proudly*)

Isn't he ? And such a sturdy little boy. He weighed ten pounds before he was a month old.

MONTY (*shyly*)

I say, Janet.

JANET

Yes ?

MONTY (*hesitates*)

You'll let me kiss you once more, won't you? For the last time? . . . (*she hesitates*). You don't mind?

JANET (*heartily*)

Of course not, Monty. You're not *married* yet, you know.

MONTY

Janet! My dear, dear Janet!

[*Seizes her and kisses her fiercely.*]

JANET (*releasing herself gently*)

That's enough, Monty.

MONTY (*remorsefully*)

I'm afraid I behaved like an awful brute to you, Janet.

JANET (*lightly*)

Oh no.

MONTY

Yes, I did. I ought to have married you. I ought to marry you still. On account of the boy.

JANET (*quite matter of fact*)

Oh well, you can't do that now in any case, can you—as you're engaged to Bertha Aldenham.

MONTY

You've heard about that? Who told you?

JANET

A worthy lady called Miss Deanes.

MONTY

I know. A regular sickener.



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JANET

My dear Monty !

MONTY

Sorry.

JANET

She brought the good news. The very day I arrived as it happened. We've hardly talked of anything else at the Manor House since—except father's illness, of course.

MONTY

Why ?

JANET

What else is there to talk about—in Brendon !

MONTY

That's true. Isn't it . . . (*stops himself, looks at watch. Whistles.*) Whew ! [*Rises.*

JANET

What is it, Monty ?

MONTY

I say, Janet, I wonder if you'd mind going now ?

JANET

Why ?

[*She rises too.*

MONTY (*awkwardly*)

Well, the fact is I'm expecting some one here directly. I . . .

JANET

Bertha ?

MONTY

Yes. I was to meet her here at the stile at six.

JANET

Our stile, Monty.

MONTY

Yes, . . . You don't mind, do you—about my asking you to go, I mean?

JANET (*sitting again*)

Not in the least.

MONTY

But you're not going?

JANET

Why should I go?

MONTY

Oh, well, I thought . . . . .

JANET

That it wouldn't be quite suitable for us to meet?

MONTY

I didn't mean that, of course. But I thought you mightn't like—I mean it might be painful . . .

[*Sits again.*]

JANET

For me to see her? On the contrary, I'm dying to see her.

MONTY

Janet, sometimes I think you're not quite human,

JANET

My dear boy, I'm extremely human—and therefore curious (*pause*). What's she like, Monty? Now, I mean. She promised to be pretty.

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MONTY

She is pretty, I suppose (*pause*). I wonder if Bertha and I will ever have a son like Johnny!

JANET

Let's hope so, Monty. For Bertha's sake.

MONTY

Isn't that some one coming? (*pause, listens*), I expect it's she (*rising hastily and advancing towards stile*). Is that you, Bertha?

BERTHA (*at stile*)

Oh! There you are. Yes. Isn't it hot? (*entering by gate which he opens for her*). Am I punctual? (*with a cry*) Janet! When did you come home?

[*Goes to her eagerly.*

JANET (*shaking hands*)

Only three days ago.

[*BERTHA kisses her.*

BERTHA

Only three days! And you've never been up to see us.

JANET

I know. But with father ill . . .

BERTHA

Of course. I understand. I was only joking. How is Mr. De Mullin?

JANET

Much better. Not well yet, of course. But he gets stronger every day.

BERTHA

I'm so glad. I say, Janet, do you remember when you used to teach us French?

JANET

Yes.

BERTHA

I was awfully troublesome, I remember.

MONTY

I expect you were an awful duffer at it too, Bertha.

BERTHA

What cheek!

MONTY

Wasn't she, Ja—*(pulls himself up)* Miss De Mullin?

*[JANET smiles nervously.]*

BERTHA

I didn't know you'd met Janet, Monty?

MONTY

Oh, yes.

BERTHA

Why didn't you tell us?

*[Quite unsuspecting of anything wrong. Merely curious.]*

MONTY

It was some time ago.

BERTHA *(surprised)*

Not at Brendon? You've never been at Brendon before.

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MONTY

No. It was at Weymouth. I was there getting over typhoid years ago.

BERTHA

I remember, you told me. Eight or nine years ago, wasn't it ?

MONTY

Yes (*looks at watch*). I say, Bertha, we must be off if we're not to be late.

BERTHA

Give me two minutes to rest. The weather's simply stifling.

MONTY

Rot ! It's quite cool.

BERTHA

Then you must have been sitting here a long time. I've been walking along a dusty road and I'm not going to start yet. Besides I want to know all about your two meeting. Were you staying at Weymouth, Janet ?

JANET

Oh no. I just bicycled over. Mr. Bulstead ran into me.

MONTY

I like that. She ran into *me*.

JANET

Anyhow my front wheel buckled and he had to help me to put it right.

BERTHA

What gallantry !



MONTY

It was. The beastly thing took about half an hour. By the time it was over we seemed to have known each other for a lifetime (*looks at watch*). Two minutes is up. Time to start, Bertha.

BERTHA

It isn't.

MONTY

It is. You'll be late for dressing to a certainty if you don't go.

BERTHA

I like that. I can dress as quickly as you if it comes to that.

MONTY

Oh no. I can dress in ten minutes. I'll give you a quarter of an hour's start and be down in the drawing-room five minutes before you're ready. Is it a bet?

BERTHA

Done. In sixpences. (*To JANET*) I'm staying at the Park for a few days longer, Janet. Come up and see me, won't you?

JANET (*uncomfortably*)

I'm afraid I can't promise. On account of father.

BERTHA

Well, after I've gone home then. Mother will want to see you. And so will Helen. And now I suppose I really must go. Come along, Monty.

MONTY

Not I. I needn't go for a quarter of an hour. You have a quarter of an hour's start.

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BERTHA

All right. Good-bye, Janet (*kisses her*). You won't forget about coming as soon as you can? I go back home on Thursday.

JANET

I won't forget. Good-bye. [*BERTHA goes off through the wood. JANET watches her go and there is a pause.*] Yes, she *is* pretty, Monty. Very pretty.

MONTY (*nods*)

You don't mind?

JANET

Her being pretty? Of course not. It's a justification.

MONTY

A justification?

JANET

For forgetting me.

MONTY (*impulsively, seizing her hands*)

Janet, I've never done that. You know I haven't.

JANET (*drawing back*)

No, Monty. Not again. [*Pause.*]

MONTY

I say, I as nearly as possible called you Janet right out before Bertha.

JANET

So I saw. You *did* call me Miss De Mullin, by the way,—which wasn't very clever of you.

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MONTY

Did I? What an ass I am! But I don't suppose she noticed.

JANET

I dare say not. (*A shrill cry comes from the wood on the right. Then silence. JANET starts up.*) What was that?

MONTY

I don't know.

JANET

It sounded like a child. Where did it come from? Over here, didn't it?

MONTY

I think so.

JANET (*alarmed*)

I hope Johnny . . . I must go and see . . . (*A moment later JOHNNY runs in R., sobbing, followed by MRS. DE MULLIN and BERTHA.*) Johnny! What is it, my sweetheart?

[*Runs to him.*

JOHNNY

Oh, Mummie, Mummie, I was running after the rabbits and I tripped over some nettles and they stung me.

MRS. DE MULLIN

He put his foot in a hole, Janet. He fell just as I met Bertha (*shakes hands with MONTY*). How do you do Mr. Bulstead.

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JANET

There! There! my pet. Did it hurt very much?  
Mother shall kiss it and make it well.

[*Does so.*

JOHNNY (*sobs*)

Oh-h-h——

BERTHA

Is he your son?

JANET

Yes. Don't cry any more, dear. Brave boys don't  
cry, you know.

JOHNNY (*gasps*)

It h-hurts so.

JANET

I know. But crying won't make it hurt less, will it?  
So you must dry your eyes. Come now.

JOHNNY

All right, Mummie.

[*Stills sobs gradually.*

BERTHA (*astonished*)

I'd no idea you were married, Janet.

JANET

Hadn't you?

BERTHA

No. When was it?

JANET

Eight years ago. Nearly nine. To Mr. Seagrave.

BERTHA

Is he down here with you?

JANET

No. My husband died soon after our marriage.

BERTHA

Poor Janet. I'm so sorry (*pause*). And it was before your marriage that Monty met you?

JANET

How do you know?

BERTHA (*quite unsuspecting*)

He called you Miss De Mullin.

JANET

Of course.

MRS. DE MULLIN (*pricking up her ears suspiciously at this.*)

I didn't know you had met my daughter before, Mr. Bulstead.

BERTHA

Nor did I. They met down at Weymouth quite by chance eight or nine years ago.

MRS. DE MULLIN (*gravely*)

Indeed?

MONTY

Yes . . . I say, Bertha, excuse my interrupting you. but we really must be off now if we're not to be late.

BERTHA

You want to win that bet!

MONTY

The bet's off. There's no time to give you any



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start. I must come too or I shan't be in time myself and the Governor will simply curse.

BERTHA

Is Mr. Bulstead *very* fierce if people are late for dinner ?

MONTY

Simply beastly.

BERTHA

How very unpleasant ! I wonder if I'm wise to marry into the family ?

[*Shaking hands merrily with MRS. DE MULLIN and JANET. Then goes off R., laughing merrily.*]

MONTY (*sardonically*)

I wonder (*shakes hands with MRS. DE MULLIN and JANET*). Will you give me a kiss, old chap ?

[*To JOHNNY.*]

JOHNNY

That's three times.

[MONTY *nods*.

[MONTY *follows BERTHA off R. A long pause.*

MRS. DE MULLIN *looks fixedly at JANET.*

JANET *looks at the ground.*

MRS. DE MULLIN (*slowly*)

Mr. Montague Bulstead seems unusually fond of children, Janet.

JANET

Does he, mother ?

[*She does not look up.*]

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MRS. DE MULLIN

Yes. Johnny is rather old to be kissed by strangers.

JANET

I supposed he kissed him because he was brave about being stung.

MRS. DE MULLIN

He seems to have kissed him before. Twice.

JANET

I dare say. I didn't notice.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Johnny did, apparently.

JANET

Well, it doesn't matter anyway, does it? (*Looks up defiantly. Meets her mother's eyes full on her.*) Why do you look at me like that, mother?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Send Johnny away for a little, Janet. I want to speak to you.

JANET

I'd rather not, mother. He might hurt himself again.

MRS. DE MULLIN

He will be quite safe. Run away, Johnny. But don't go too far.

JOHNNY

All right, grandmother.

[JOHNNY trots off into the wood. Pause.

JANET (*defiantly*)

Well, mother?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Janet, why did you never tell us you had met Mr. Bulstead before ?

JANET

When ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Any time during the last three days, when we were speaking of his engagement.

JANET

I'd forgotten all about it, mother.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Indeed ? And why didn't you tell us eight years ago, when you met him at Weymouth, when you were still "Miss De Mullin" ?

JANET

Mother, don't badger me like this. If you want to ask me anything ask it.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Janet, Mr. Bulstead is Johnny's father.

JANET

Mr. Bulstead ? Absurd !

MRS. DE MULLIN

Then why did you pretend not to have met him ? Why did you conceal the fact of your meeting him from us eight years ago ? And why has he concealed the fact from Bertha and the Bulsteads ?

[Pause.

JANET (*resignedly*)

Very well, mother, if you're determined to know you must know. Yes, he's Johnny's father.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Oh, Janet !

JANET (*irritably*)

Well, mother, if you didn't want to know you shouldn't have asked. I told you not to worry me. (MRS. DE MULLIN *begins to cry. Remorsefully,*) There, there, mother ! Don't cry. I'm sorry I was cross to you. Don't let's talk any more about it.

MRS. DE MULLIN (*snuffling*)

No, Janet, we *must* talk about it. There's no use trying to hide things any longer. You must tell me the truth.

JANET

Much better not, mother. It won't give you any pleasure to hear.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Still, I'd rather know, Janet.

JANET (*sbrugs*)

As you please. What do you want me to tell you ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Everything. How did you come to be at Weymouth ? I don't remember your staying at Weymouth eight years ago.

JANET

I wasn't staying there. But Monty was.

MRS. DE MULLIN (*shocked*)

Monty !

JANET

Mr. Bulstead. Oh, what *does* it matter now ?

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He'd had typhoid and was there to recruit. I'd ridden over on my bicycle . . .

MRS. DE MULLIN (*lamentably*)

Bicycle! I always said it was all through bicycling.

JANET (*another shrug*)

He ran into me, or I ran into him. I was rather shaken, and he asked me to come in and rest. It happened close to the house where he was lodging.

MRS. DE MULLIN

You went in! To his lodgings! A man you had never met before!

JANET

My dear mother, when you have been thrown off a bicycle, ordinary conventions cease to apply. Besides, as a matter of fact, we *had* met once before—the day before, in fact.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Where?

JANET

Here. By this very stile. Monty was riding past and he asked me the way to somewhere—Thoresby, I think. I was standing by the stile. Next day I happened to ride into Weymouth. We collided—and the rest you know.

MRS. DE MULLIN (*sternly*)

Were those the *only* times you met him, Janet?

JANET

Of course not, mother. After the Weymouth collision we met constantly, nearly every day. We used



to meet out riding and I had tea with him lots of times in his rooms.

MRS. DE MULLIN (*horrifed*)

How long did this go on ?

JANET

More than a month—till he left Weymouth, in fact. Now, mother, is that all you want to know ? Because if so we'll drop the subject.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Oh, Janet, what *will* your father say !

JANET

Father ? He won't know.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Won't know ? But I must tell him.

JANET

Good heavens, why ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

In order that Mr. Bulstead may marry you, of course. Your father will insist on his marrying you.

JANET

If father attempts to do that, mother, I shall deny the whole story. And Monty will back me up.

MRS. DE MULLIN

He would never be so wicked.

JANET

He would have to if I ask him. It's the least he could do.

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MRS. DE MULLIN

Johnny is there to prove it.

JANET

There's nothing to prove that Monty is Johnny's father. Nothing whatever.

MRS. DE MULLIN

But, Janet, *why* won't you marry him ?

JANET (*impatiently*)

My dear mother, because I don't want to, of course.

MRS. DE MULLIN

You don't *want* to ?

JANET

Great heavens, no. Why should I ? Monty Bulstead isn't at all the sort of man I should care to *marry*.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Why not ?

JANET

Frankly, mother, because he's not interesting enough. Monty's a very nice fellow and I like him very much, but I don't want to pass the remainder of my life with him. If I'm to marry anybody—and I don't think I shall—it will have to be a rather more remarkable person than Monty Bulstead.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Yet you *did* love him, Janet. You must have loved him . . . then.

JANET

Oh yes. Then. But that was ages ago, before

Johnny was born. After that I didn't care for anybody any more except Johnny.

MRS. DE MULLIN

But, Janet, you *ought* to marry him, for Johnny's sake.

JANET

Too late, mother. That should have been eight years ago to be any use.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Better too late than not at all.

JANET

Better not at all than too late.

MRS. DE MULLIN

He seduced you, Janet.

JANET (*thoughtfully*)

Did he? I was twenty-seven. He was twenty. If either of us was to blame, wasn't it I?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Janet, you're trying to screen him.

JANET

Dearest mother, you talk like a sentimental novel.

MRS. DE MULLIN (*indignantly*)

And he's to be allowed to marry Bertha Aldenham, just as if this had never happened?

JANET

Why not? It's not *her* fault, is it? And girls find it difficult enough to get married nowadays, goodness knows.

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MRS. DE MULLIN

Still, she *ought* to be told, Janet. I think *she must* be told.

JANET

My dear mother, if *she* knows everybody will know, and the scandal will make all the dead and gone De Mullins turn in their graves. As for father it would simply kill him out of hand.

MRS. DE MULLIN (*sadly*)

Poor father.

JANET (*briskly*)

So, on the whole, I don't think we'll tell any one. Come, mother, it's time we started. (*More kindly*) Poor mother. Don't fret. Perhaps Hester will have some news to cheer you when we get home.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Hester ?

JANET (*rallying her*)

An engagement, mother. Hester's engagement. Hester and Mr. Brown have been decorating the church for the last *four* hours. What an opportunity for a declaration ! Or don't people propose in church ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Janet, how can you laugh after what has happened ?

JANET

Laugh ? Of course I can laugh. What else is there to do ? Let's go home. Johnny ! Johnny ! (*calls*).  
[*By this time twilight is falling. A full moon has begun to rise, lighting up the scene.*]

JOHNNY (*off R.*)

Yes, Mummie.

JANET

Come along, dear. Mother's going to start.

JOHNNY (*off R.*)

All right, Mummie. (*entering R.*) Oh, Mummie, you've not seen my rabbits yet!

JANET

No. It's too dark to-night. Mother must come and see them another time.

JOHNNY

You won't forget, will you, Mummie? (*looking at Mrs. DE MULLIN*) Grandmother, you've been crying. Is that because I stung myself with a nettle?

JANET

Little egoist! Of course it is. Give your grandmother a kiss and we'll all walk home together.

[*Mrs. DE MULLIN stoops and kisses JOHNNY passionately. They go off through the gate and the curtain falls.*]



## ACT III

*Five days have passed since Act II*

SCENE : *As in Act I*

TIME : *Late afternoon*

[*When the curtain rises* MRS. CLOUSTON, MRS. DE MULLIN, and JANET are on the stage. *The nervous tension of the last few days has clearly told on JANET, who looks feverish and irritable.*

MRS. DE MULLIN (*speaking off into the hall on the right*)  
Good-bye. Good-bye.

JANET (*who is standing about c., scornfully*)  
Good-bye ! Good-bye !

MRS. CLOUSTON (*shocked*)

Janet !

JANET (*fiercely*)

How many times a week does that Bulstead woman think it necessary to call on us ?

MRS. CLOUSTON (*sitting*)

She doesn't call very often.

JANET

She's been three times this week.

MRS. DE MULLIN (*closing door R.*)

Naturally she wants to hear how your father is, dear.

JANET (*irritably*)

My dear mother, what *can* it matter to Mrs. Bulstead whether father lives or dies?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Janet!

JANET (*exasperated*)

Well, mother, do you seriously believe she cares? Or Miss Deanes? Or Miss Rolt? Or any of these people? They only call because they've nothing better to do. It's sheer mental vacuity on their part. Besides, father's perfectly well now. They know that. But they go on *calling, calling!* I wonder Miss Deanes doesn't bring her cockatoo to inquire.

[*Tramps to and fro impatiently.*]

MRS. CLOUSTON

Really, Janet, I can't think what's the matter with you. Do sit down and try and exercise some self-control.

JANET

I've no self-control where these Brendon people are concerned. They get on my nerves, every one of them. . . . Where's Johnny?

MRS. DE MULLIN

In the garden, I think.

JANET

Sensible boy ! He's had enough of visitors for one day, I'll be bound. I'll go out and join him.

*[Goes out angrily.]*

MRS. CLOUSTON

I can't think what's come to Janet the last day or two. Her temper gets worse and worse.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Perhaps it's only the hot weather. No De Mullin——

MRS. CLOUSTON

Nonsense, Jane, don't be foolish. We can't have Janet giving way to that sort of thing at her age.

MRS. DE MULLIN

I'm afraid she is rather irritable just now. She flew out quite savagely at Hester to-day just after luncheon.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Why was that ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Because of something she had been teaching Johnny. The Athanasian Creed I think it was. Yes, it must have been that because Johnny asked Janet what was meant by three Incomprehensibles. Janet asked him where he had heard all that and Johnny said Aunt Hester had taught it to him. Janet was very angry and forbade Hester ever to teach him anything again. Hester was quite hurt about it.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Naturally. Still, I do think Hester might have chosen something else to teach him.

MRS. DE MULLIN

That was what Janet said.

MRS. CLOUSTON

But that's no reason why she shouldn't behave herself when visitors are here. She was quite rude to Mrs. Bulstead. What they think of her in London when she goes on like this I can't imagine.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Perhaps she isn't like this in London.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Of course she is, Jane. Worse. Here she has the restraining influences of home life. Whereas in London, living alone as she does . . .

MRS. DE MULLIN

She has Johnny.

MRS. CLOUSTON

She has Johnny, of course. But that's not enough. She ought to have a husband to look after her.

MRS. DE MULLIN (*sighs*)

Yes.

[*Seats herself slowly beside her sister.*]

MRS. CLOUSTON

Where's Hester?

MRS. DE MULLIN

At church, I expect.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Church! Why the girl's always at church.

MRS. DE MULLIN

It's a Wednesday. And it does no harm, I think.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Let us hope not, Jane.

[DE MULLIN enters by the door on the left.  
He has evidently got over his recent attack  
and looks comparatively hale and vigorous.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Have you had your nap, Hugo?

DE MULLIN

Yes. The sunset woke me, I suppose. It was shining full on my face.

MRS. DE MULLIN

What a pity it woke you.

DE MULLIN

It didn't matter. I've slept enough . . . (*wanders towards sofa, c.*). Where's Johnny?

MRS. DE MULLIN

In the garden, I think, with Janet.

DE MULLIN (*wanders to window, c., and looks out*).

Yes. There he is. He's playing hide and seek with Ellen. . . . Now she's caught him. No, he's got away. Bravo, Johnny! (*Stands watching intently for a while. Then turns and comes down c.*) What a fine little fellow it is! A true De Mullin!



MRS. DE MULLIN

Do you think so, Hugo ?

DE MULLIN

Every inch of him ! (*pause, sits c., half to himself*)  
If only Janet had been married !

MRS. DE MULLIN (*sighs*)

Yes.

DE MULLIN (*musings*)

I wonder who the father really was. (*looking up*)  
She has never told you, Jane, I suppose ?

MRS. DE MULLIN (*steadily, without looking up*)  
No, Hugo.

MRS. CLOUSTON

And never will. Nobody was ever so obstinate as Janet.

DE MULLIN (*nods sadly*)

Janet always had plenty of will.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Far too much ! [*pause.*]

MRS. DE MULLIN

You'll quite miss Johnny when he goes away from us, won't you, Hugo.

DE MULLIN

Yes. I never thought I could grow so fond of a child.  
The house will seem empty without him.

MRS. DE MULLIN

I shall miss him too.

DE MULLIN

We shall all miss him. (*pause, thoughtfully*) I

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wonder if Janet would leave him with us when she goes back to London ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Leave him with us ? Altogether, you mean ?

DE MULLIN

Yes.

MRS. DE MULLIN

I'm afraid not, Hugo. In fact, I'm quite sure she would not. She's so fond of Johnny.

DE MULLIN

I suppose she wouldn't (*pause*). I was greatly shocked at what you told me about her the other day, Harriet.

MRS. CLOUSTON

About her keeping a shop, you mean ?

DE MULLIN

Yes. And going into partnership with a Miss Higgs or Hicks. It all sounds most discreditable.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Deplorable.

MRS. DE MULLIN (*meekly*)

She had to do something to keep herself, Hugo.

DE MULLIN

No doubt. Still, it can't be considered a proper sort of position for my daughter. I think she must give it up at once.

MRS. DE MULLIN

She would only have to take to something else.

DE MULLIN

Not necessarily. She might come back here to live with us . . . with Johnny, of course.

MRS. DE. MULLIN (*astonished*)

*Live* with us ?

DE MULLIN

Why not, Jane ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Well, of course if *you* think so, Hugo.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Are you sure you will like to have Janet living at home again, Hugo ?

DE MULLIN

I think it might be the best arrangement. And I shall like to have Johnny here. He's our only descendant, Harriet, the last of the De Mullins. If you or Jane had had a son it would be different.

MRS. CLOUSTON (*sighs*)

Yes.

DE MULLIN

As it is I don't see how we can do anything better than have them both down here—as Jane doesn't think Janet would part with Johnny. It would be better for Janet too. It would take her away from her present unsatisfactory surroundings. It would give her a position and independence—everything she now lacks.

MRS. DE MULLIN

I should have thought she was *independent* now, Hugo.

DE MULLIN (*irritably*)

My dear Jane, how can a woman possibly be independent whose income comes out of selling hats? The only form of independence that is possible or desirable for a woman is that she shall be dependent upon her husband or, if she is unmarried, on her nearest male relative. I am sure *you* agree with me, Harriet?

MRS. CLOUSTON

Quite, Hugo.

DE MULLIN

Very well. I will speak to her about it at once.

MRS. DE MULLIN (*nervously*)

I hardly think I would say anything about it to-day, Hugo.

DE MULLIN

Why not, Jane?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Well, she seems nervous and irritable to-day. I think I should put it off for a day or two.

DE MULLIN (*testily*)

My dear Jane, you are always procrastinating. If such an arrangement is to be made the sooner it is made the better. (*Goes to window, c., calls*) Janet my dear. Janet.

[*Pause. Then JANET appears at window, c.*]

JANET

Did you call me, father?

DE MULLIN

Yes. Come to me for a moment. I want to speak to you. (DE MULLIN wanders undecidedly to the fireplace. A moment later JANET enters from the garden.) Is Johnny with you?

JANET

No. He's having tea with Ellen. I said he might.

[Pause. JANET comes down.]

DE MULLIN

Janet, your mother and I have been talking over your future.

JANET

Have you, father?

[With a quick glance at her mother. MRS. DE MULLIN, however, makes no sign.]

DE MULLIN

Yes. We have come to the conclusion that it would be better for you to come back here to live.

[JANET faces round towards her father.]

JANET

But what would become of the business?

DE MULLIN

You will have to give up the business, of course. So much the better. You never ought to have gone into it. It was not at all a suitable occupation for you.

JANET

But I like it, father.



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MRS. CLOUSTON

*Like* it ! A De Mullin *like* keeping a shop ! Impossible.

JANET (*firmly*)

Yes, Aunt Harriet, I like it. And I'm proud of it.

DE MULLIN (*sharply*)

Nonsense, Janet. Nobody can possibly be proud of keeping a shop.

JANET

*I* am. I made it, you see. It's my child, like Johnny.

DE MULLIN (*amazed*)

Janet ! Do you understand what you're doing ? I offer you the chance of returning to Brendon to live as my daughter.

JANET (*indifferently*)

I quite understand, father. And I'm much obliged for the offer. Only I decline it. That's all.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Really !

DE MULLIN (*with dignity*)

The question is, are you to be allowed to decline it, in Johnny's interests if not your own ?

JANET

Johnny's ?

DE MULLIN

Yes. Johnny's. As long as he was a child it made little difference where he was brought up. Relatively little that is. Now he is getting to an age when early associations are all-important. Living here at

Brendon in the home of his ancestors he will grow up worthy of the race from which he is descended. He will be a true De Mullin.

JANET (*quietly*)

Perhaps I don't want him to be a true De Mullin, father.

DE MULLIN

What do you mean ?

JANET

My dear father, you're infatuated about your De Mullins. Who are the De Mullins, after all ? Mere country squires who lived on here down at Brendon generation after generation. What have they ever done that I should want Johnny to be like them ? Nothing. There's not one of them who has ever distinguished himself in the smallest degree or made his name known outside his native village. The De Mullins are, and have always been, nobodies. Look at their portraits. Is there a single one of them that is worth a second glance ? Why they never even had the brains to be painted by a decent artist. With the result that they aren't worth the canvas they're painted on. Or is it board ? I'd make a bonfire of them if they were mine.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Janet !

JANET (*impatiently*)

I would. You seem to think there's some peculiar virtue about always living in the same place. I believe in people uprooting themselves and doing something

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with their lives. What was the good of the De Mullins going on living down here century after century, always a little poorer and a little poorer, selling a farm here, mortgaging another there, instead of going out into the world to seek their fortunes? We've stayed too long in one place, we De Mullins. We shall never be worth anything sleeping away our lives down at Brendon.

DE MULLIN (*sharply*)

Janet, you are talking foolishly. What you say only makes it clearer to me that you cannot be allowed to live by yourself in London any longer. Such a life is demoralizing to you. You must come back to Brendon.

JANET

I shall not come back to Brendon, father. On that I am quite determined.

DE MULLIN (*with dignity*)

My dear, this is not a matter that rests with you. My mind is made up. Hitherto I have only asked you to return. Do not force me to command you.

JANET (*fiercely*)

Command? By what right do you command?

DE MULLIN

By the right of a father, Janet. By that right I insist on your obedience.

JANET (*losing her temper*)

Obedience! Obedience! I owe no one obedience. I am of full age and can order my life as I please. Is a woman never to be considered old enough to manage

her own affairs? Is she to go down to her grave everlastingly under tutelage? Is she always to be obeying a father when she's not obeying a husband? Well, I, for one, will not submit to such nonsense. I'm sick of this everlasting *obedience*.

DE MULLIN (*fiercely*)

Janet . . . !

[*Door opens* L. ELLEN *enters with the lamp. There is a considerable pause, during which ELLEN puts down the lamp, turns it up, pulls down the blind and begins to draw the curtains. In the middle of the last process DE MULLIN intervenes.*

DE MULLIN (*irritably*)

You can leave the curtains, Ellen.

ELLEN

Very well, sir.

[*Exit ELLEN* L. *with maddening deliberation. Pause.*

JANET

Father, I'm sorry if what I said vexed you. Perhaps I spoke too strongly.

DE MULLIN (*with great dignity*)

Very well, Janet. You will remain with us.

JANET

No, father, that's not possible. For Johnny's sake, as well as my own, it would be madness for us to live down here.

DE MULLIN

For Johnny's sake?

JANET

Yes, Johnny's. In London we're not known, he and I. There he's simply Johnny Seagrave, the son of a respectable widow who keeps a hat-shop. Here he is the son of Janet De Mullin who ran away from home one night eight years ago and whose name was never mentioned again by her parents until one fine day she turned up with an eight-year-old boy and said she was married. How long would they take to see through *that* story down here, do you think?

MRS. CLOUSTON (*tartly*)

Whose fault is that?

JANET

Never mind whose fault it is, Aunt Harriet. The question is, will they see through it or will they not? Of course, they *know* nothing so far, but I've no doubt they suspect. What else have people to do down here but suspect other people? Miss Deanes murmurs her doubts to Mrs. Bulstead and Mrs. Bulstead shakes her head to Miss Deanes. Mrs. Bulstead! What right has *she* to look down that huge nose of hers at *me*! She's had *ten* children!

MRS. DE MULLIN

Janet! She's married.

JANET

To Mr. Bulstead! That vulgar animal! You don't ask me to consider that *a merit*, do you? No, Mrs. Bulstead shan't have the chance of sneering at Johnny if *I* can help it. Or at me either.



MRS. DE MULLIN

Janet, listen to me. You don't understand how your father feels about this or how much it means to him. Johnny is his only grandchild—our only descendant. He would adopt him and call him De Mullin, and then the name would not die out. You know how much your father thinks of that and how sorry he has always been that I never had a son.

JANET (*more gently*)

I know, mother. But when Hester marries . . .

DE MULLIN

Hester ?

JANET

Yes.

DE MULLIN (*turning angrily to his wife*)

But whom is Hester going to marry ? *Is* she going to marry ? I have heard nothing about this. What's this, Jane ? Has something been kept from me ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

No, no, Hugo. Nothing has been kept from you. It's only some fancy of Janet's. She thinks Mr. Brown is going to propose to Hester. There's nothing in it, really.

DE MULLIN

Mr. Brown ! Impossible !

MRS. CLOUSTON

Quite impossible !

JANET (*calmly*)

Why impossible, father ?

DE MULLIN

He would never dare to do such a thing. *Mr. Brown* to have the audacity to propose to *my* daughter!

JANET (*quietly*)

Why not, father?

DE MULLIN (*bubbling with rage*)

Because he is not of a suitable position. Because the *De Mullins* cannot be expected to marry people of *that* class. Because . . .

JANET (*sbrugs*)

I dare say Mr. Brown won't think of all that. Anyhow, I hope he won't. I hope he'll propose to Hester and she'll accept him and then when they've a whole herd of little Browns you can select one of them and make a De Mullin of him, poor little wretch.

[*At this moment HESTER enters from the garden.*  
*An uncomfortable silence falls.*

MRS. DE MULLIN

Hush, hush, Janet. Here is Hester. Is that you, Hester? Have you come from church?

HESTER

Yes, mother.

[*She comes down, her face looking pale and drawn, and stands by her mother.*

MRS. DE MULLIN

You're very late, dear.

HESTER

A little. I stayed on after service was over.

MRS. CLOUSTON

How very eccentric of you !

HESTER (*quietly*)

I suppose saying one's prayers does seem eccentric to you, Aunt Harriet ?

MRS. CLOUSTON

My dear Hester, considering you'd only just finished *one* service . . .

JANET (*who has not noticed the look on her sister's face*)

Well, Aunt Harriet, who was right ?

MRS. DE MULLIN

Hush, Janet !

JANET (*gaily*)

My dear mother, what on earth is there to "hush" about ? And what on earth is there to keep Hester in church half an hour after service is over, if it's not what I told you ?

HESTER

What do you mean ?

JANET

Nothing, dear. Come and give me a kiss.

[*Pulling her towards her.*]

HESTER (*repulsing her roughly*)

I won't. Leave me alone, Janet. What has she been saying about me, mother ? I insist on knowing.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Nothing, dear. Only some nonsense about you and Mr. Brown. Janet is always talking nonsense.

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JANET

Yes, Hester. About you and Mr. Brown. *Your* Mr. Brown. Confess he has asked you to marry him as I said ?

HESTER (*slowly*)

Mr. Brown is engaged to be married to Agatha Bulstead. He told me so this evening after service.

JANET

He told you !

HESTER

Yes. He asked me to congratulate him.

JANET

The little wretch !

MRS. DE MULLIN

To Agatha Bulstead ? That's the plain one, isn't it ?

HESTER

The third one. Yes.

JANET

The plain one ! Good heavens, it oughtn't to be allowed. The children will be little monsters.

MRS. CLOUSTON

So that's why you were so long at church ?

HESTER

Yes. I was praying that they might be happy.

JANET

Poor Hester !

MRS. DE MULLIN

Are you disappointed, dear ?

HESTER

I'd rather not talk about it if you don't mind, mother.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Your father would never have given his consent.

HESTER

So Mr. Brown said.

JANET

The little *worm*.

MRS. DE MULLIN

My dear !

JANET

Well, mother, isn't it too contemptible ?

DE MULLIN

I'm bound to say Mr. Brown seems to have behaved in a very fitting manner.

JANET

You think so, father ?

DE MULLIN

Certainly. He saw what my objections would be and recognized that they were reasonable. Nothing could be more proper.

JANET

Well, father. I don't know what you do want. Ten minutes ago you were supposed to be wanting a grandson to adopt. Here's Hester going the right way to provide one, and you don't like that either.

HESTER

What is all this about, father ? What have you all been discussing while I've been out ?



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MRS. DE MULLIN

It was nothing about you, Hester.

HESTER

I'm not sure of that, mother. Anyhow I should like to hear what it was.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Hester, that is not at all a proper tone to use in speaking to your mother.

HESTER (*fiercely*)

Please don't interfere, Aunt Harriet. I suppose I can be trusted to speak to my mother properly by this time.

MRS. CLOUSTON

You certainly ought to, my dear. You are quite old enough.

HESTER

Very well then. Perhaps you will be good enough not to dictate to me in future. What was it you were discussing, father?

JANET

I'll tell you, Hester. Father wanted to adopt Johnny. He wanted me to come down here to live altogether.

HESTER

Indeed? Well, father, understand, please, that if Janet comes down here to live *I go!*

MRS. DE MULLIN

Hester!

HESTER

I will not live in the same house with Janet. Nothing shall induce me. I would rather beg my bread.

JANET

That settles it then. Thanks, Hester. I'm glad you had the pluck to say that. You are right. Quite right.

HESTER

I can do without *your* approval, Janet.

JANET (*recklessly*)

Of course you can. But you can have it all the same. You never wanted me down here. You always disapproved of my being sent for. I ought never to have come. I wish I hadn't come. My coming has only done harm to Hester, as she knew it would.

DE MULLIN

How harm?

JANET

Mr. Brown would have asked Hester to marry him if I hadn't come. He meant to; I'm sure of it.

MRS. DE MULLIN

But he said . . .

JANET

I know. But that was only an excuse. Young men aren't so considerate of their future fathers-in-law as all that nowadays. No. Mr. Brown heard some story about me from Miss Deanes. Or perhaps the Vicar put him on his guard. Isn't it so, Hester?

[HESTER *nods*.

MRS. DE MULLIN

But as your father would never have consented, dear . . .

HESTER (*slowly*)

Still, I'd rather he had asked me, mother.

JANET

Quite right, Hester! I'm glad you've got some wholesome feminine vanity left in your composition. And you'd have said "yes," like a sensible woman.

HESTER

Oh, you're always sneering!

JANET

Yes. But I'm *going*, Hester, *going*! *That's* the great thing! Keep your eyes fixed steadily on that and you'll be able to bear anything else. That reminds me. (*Goes to door, L., and calls loudly into the hall.*) Johnny! Johnny!

MRS. CLOUSTON

Really, Janet!

JANET

Oh, I forgot. It's not genteel to call into the passage, is it? I ought to have rung. I apologise, Aunt Harriet. (*Calls again*) Johnny!

MRS. DE MULLIN

Why are you calling Johnny?

JANET

To tell him to put on his hat and coat, mother dear. I'm going to the station.

DE MULLIN

You're going to-night?

JANET

Yes, father, to-night. I've done harm enough down here. I'm going away.

JOHNNY (*entering L.*)

Do you want me, Mummie?

JANET

Yes. Run and put on your things and say good-bye to Cook and Ellen and tell Robert to put in the pony. Mother's going back to London.

JOHNNY

Are we going now, Mummie?

JANET (*nods*)

As fast as the train can carry us. And tell Ellen to lock my trunk for me and give you the key. Run along.

[*Exit* JOHNNY, L.]

DE MULLIN

Lock your trunk! But you've not *packed*?

JANET

Oh yes, I have. Everything's packed, down to my last shoelace. I don't know how often I haven't packed and unpacked during the last five days.

MRS. DE MULLIN (*astonished and hurt*)

You meant to leave us then, Janet? You've been *wanting* to leave us all the time?

JANET

Yes, mother. I've been wanting to leave you. I can't stay here any longer. Brendon stifles me. It has too many ghosts. I suppose it's your ridiculous De Mullins.

DE MULLIN

Janet!

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JANET

I know, father. That's blasphemy, isn't it? But I can't help it. I must go. I've been meaning to tell you every day for the last four days, but somehow I always put it off.

DE MULLIN

Understand me, Janet. If you leave this house to-night you leave it for ever.

JANET (*cheerfully*)

All right, father.

DE MULLIN (*growing angrier*)

Understand, too, that if you leave it you are never to hold any communication either with me or with any one in it henceforward. You are cut off from the family. I will never see you or recognize you in any way, or speak to you again as long as I live.

JANET (*astonished*)

My dear father, why are you so angry? Is there anything so dreadful in my wanting to live in London instead of in the country?

DE MULLIN (*getting more and more excited*)

Why am I angry! Why am I . . . !

MRS. DE MULLIN

Sh! Hugo! You mustn't excite yourself. You know the doctor said . . .

DE MULLIN

Be quiet, Jane! (*turning furiously to JANET*) Why am I angry! You disgrace the family. You have a child, that poor fatherless boy. . . .



JANET (*quietly*)

Oh come, I could have got along quite well without a father if it comes to that. And so could Hester.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Janet !

JANET

Well, mother, what has father ever done for Hester or me except try and prevent us from doing something we wanted to do ? Hester wanted to marry Mr. Brown. Father wouldn't have allowed her. He's not genteel enough to marry a De Mullin. I want to go back to my shop. Father objects to that. That's not genteel enough for a De Mullin either. Well, hang all the De Mullins, say I.

DE MULLIN (*furious*)

I forbid you to speak of your family in that way—of *my* family ! I forbid it ! It is an outrage. Your ancestors were honourable men and pure women. They did their duty in the position in which they were born, and handed on their name untarnished to their children. Hitherto our honour has been unsullied. You have sullied it. You have brought shame upon your parents and shame upon your son, and that shame you can never wipe out. If you had in you a spark of human feeling, if you were not worthless and heartless you would blush to look me in the face or your child in the face. But you are utterly hardened. I ought never to have offered to receive you back into this house. I ought never to have consented to see you again. I was wrong. I regret it. You are unfit for the society of decent people. Go back to London

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Take up the wretched trade you practise there. It is what you are fit for.

JANET

That's exactly what I think, father. As we agree about it why make such a fuss ?

DE MULLIN (*furious*)

Janet. . . .

HESTER

Father, don't argue with her. It's no use. (*solemnly*)  
Leave her to God.

JANET

Hester, Hester, don't deceive yourself. In your heart you envy me my baby, and you know it.

HESTER (*indignant*)

I do not.

JANET

You do. Time is running on with you, my dear. You're twenty-eight. Just the age that I was when I met my lover. Yes, my lover. In a few years you will be too old for love, too old to have children. So soon it passeth away and we are gone. Your best years are slipping by and you are growing faded and cross and peevish. Already the lines are hardening about your mouth and the hollows coming under your eyes. You will be an old woman before your time unless you marry and have children. And what will you do then? Keep a lap-dog, I suppose, or sit up at night with a sick cockatoo like Miss Deanes. Miss Deanes! Even she has a heart somewhere about her. Do you imagine she wouldn't rather give it to her babies than

snivel over *poultry*? No, Hester, make good use of your youth, my dear. It won't last always. And once gone it is gone for ever. (HESTER *bursts into tears.*) There, there, Hester! I'm sorry. I oughtn't to have spoken like that. It wasn't kind. Forgive me. (HESTER *weeps more and more violently.*) Hester, don't cry like that. I can't bear to hear you. I was angry and said more than I should. I didn't mean to vex you. Come, dear, you mustn't give way like that or you'll make yourself ill. Dry your eyes and let me see you smile. (*Caressing her.* HESTER, *who has begun by resisting her feebly, gradually allows herself to be soothed.*) That's better! My dear, what a sight you've made of yourself! But all women are hideous when they've been crying. It makes their noses red and that's dreadfully unbecoming. (HESTER *sobs out a laugh.*) No. You mustn't begin to cry again or I shall scold you. I shall, really.

HESTER (*half laughing, half crying hysterically*)

You seem to think every woman ought to behave as shamefully as you did.

JANET (*grimly*)

No, Hester. I don't think that. To do as I did needs pluck and brains—and five hundred pounds. Everything most women haven't got, poor things. So they must marry or remain childless. You must marry—the next curate. I suppose the Bulsteads will buy Mr. Brown a living as he's marrying the plainest of the daughters. It's the least they can do. But that's no reason why *I* should marry unless I choose.

MRS. CLOUSTON

Well, I've never heard of anything so disgraceful. I thought Janet at least had the grace to be ashamed of what she did!

JANET (*genuinely astonished*)

Ashamed? Ashamed of wanting to have a child? What on earth were women created for, Aunt Harriet, if not to have children?

MRS. CLOUSTON

To *marry* and have children.

JANET (*with relentless logic*)

My dear Aunt Harriet, women had children thousands of years before marriage was invented. I dare say they will go on doing so thousands of years after it has ceased to exist.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Janet!

JANET

Well, mother, that's how I feel. And I believe it's how all wholesome women feel if they would only acknowledge it. I *wanted* to have a child. I always did from the time when I got too old to play with dolls. Not an adopted child or a child of some one else's, but a baby of my very own. Of course I wanted to *marry*. That's the ordinary way a woman wants to be a mother nowadays, I suppose. But time went on and nobody came forward, and I saw myself getting old and my chance slipping away. Then I met—never mind. And I fell in love with him. Or perhaps I



only fell in love with love. I don't know. It was so splendid to find some one at last who really cared for me as women should be cared for! Not to talk to because I was clever or to play tennis with because I was strong, but to kiss me and to make love to me! Yes! To make love to me!

DE MULLIN (*solemnly*)

Listen to me, my girl. You say that now, and I dare say you believe it. But when you are older, when Johnny is grown up, you will bitterly repent having brought into the world a child who can call no man father.

JANET (*passionately*)

Never! Never! That I'm sure of. Whatever happens, even if Johnny should come to hate me for what I did, I shall always be glad to have been his mother. At least I shall have lived. These poor women who go through life listless and dull, who have never felt the joys and the pains a mother feels, how they would envy me if they knew! If they knew! To know that a child is your very own, is a part of you. That you have faced sickness and pain and death itself for it. That it is yours and nothing can take it from you because no one can understand its wants as you do. To feel it's soft breath on your cheek, to soothe it when it is fretful and still it when it cries, that is motherhood and that is glorious!

[JOHNNY runs in by the door on the left. He is obviously in the highest spirits at the thought of going home.]



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JOHNNY

The trap is round, Mummie, and the luggage is in.

JANET

That's right. Good-bye, father. (*He does not move.*)  
Say good-bye to your grandfather, Johnny. You  
won't see him again.

[DE MULLIN *kisses* JOHNNY.

MRS. DE MULLIN

Janet !

JANET

No, mother. It's best not. (*Kisses her.*) It would  
only be painful for father. Good-bye, Aunt Harriet.  
Good-bye, Hester.

[*Looks at HESTER doubtfully. Hester rises, goes  
to her slowly and kisses her.*

HESTER

Good-bye.

[*Exeunt* JOHNNY and JANET *by the door on  
the right.*

DE MULLIN (*his grey head bowed on his chest as* MRS DE  
MULLIN *timidly lays her hand on his shoulder*)

The last of the De Mullins ! The last of the De  
Mullins !

(*The curtain falls*)

